

# ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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*Ray Aldridge*

*Kristine K. Rusch*

*John E. Stith*

**Star Cops:**

*Frog or Prince?*

*By Susan Ellison*



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# Eve and the Beast

By Robert A. Metzger

Art by Larry Blamire

"Coffee," said Professor Grant Scheffeld.

His voice was empty of its normal arrogance. He would not waste such a show of emotion on someone as lowly as myself. I had once been a farm boy in Iowa, and bred blue-ribbon hogs. I had once worked in a gas station, and rebuilt a '65 Mustang that could hug the curve at Stoddards Elbow going eighty-five miles per hour. I had once spent time with girls, and steamed backseat windows at the El Dorado drive-in. All these things rated only as only minor crimes in the eyes of Dr. Grant Scheffeld, Professor of Molecular Biology and Dean of Letters and Science at Boston Tech, and would not have been sufficient to explain the loathing he felt towards me, unless you included one trivial, nonetheless critical fact. I was his graduate student. My position in the world of academia demanded that I should be spit on. Scheffeld happily obliged.

Scheffeld had not chosen me, and I certainly had not chosen him. I suffered the unfortunate luck of being deemed the best thing to ever wander out of a cornfield since the invention of distilled liquor. As an undergrad I had created something new, something profitable: a strain of locust-resistant corn. Millions of starving were saved in Africa. It was decreed by powers even greater than Professor Scheffeld that I should sit at his knee and attempt to absorb some minor fraction of his brilliance.

"Coffee," said Scheffeld once again.

The only thing standing between me and a wondrous future was the distinct possibility that if he called out for coffee one more time I'd bludgeon him with a tire iron. I'd then end up spending the rest of my days in the state pen playing hide the salami in some steamy shower with a halfwit named Rawhide. Unless I got my thesis topic approved with this project, both our futures looked rather bleak.

I carefully threaded my way through the maze of cables and conduits that fed the Beast, and found the perking Mr. Caffeine dribbling into its porcelain pot. I half filled Scheffeld's bone china mug. Next went in the non-dairy creamer and then the non-sugar sugar. Stirring was reserved for the mighty one himself.

"Coffee," said a muffled voice from behind the Beast's body.

Images of tire irons flashed through my head. I worked my way back through the strewn guts of the Beast. I noticed a dangling fiber optic link, its severed head pulsing a deep blue, and plugged it back into the

Beast's backside. I patted the old girl's stainless-steel hide gently. "Don't let me down today," I whispered to her. I squirmed past her liquid nitrogen intake.

Scheffeld turned when I approached his back. He stared at me with his black, piercing eyes. I knew that if I ever got desperate enough to play the tire iron option, I'd have to be damned good. There would be no second chance. Scheffeld reached out a perfectly manicured hand for his coffee.

"Spoon," he said.

Reaching into my back pocket, I pulled out one of his monogrammed silver tea spoons. He had received an entire gross of the spoons as a reward for narrating the highest-rated PBS show of the season, *Sex and the Frontal Lobes*.

Scheffeld inspected the spoon carefully, searching no doubt for stray pieces of dog shit or whatever else he imagined lurked in the back pocket of my jeans. After careful consideration, he plunked the spoon into his coffee. Three quick stirs and he popped it back out. For some reason, I always thought of his wife when he did this. After taking his first sip, he cleared his throat. He was preparing himself to speak. With his free hand, he pushed the flopping bangs of his jet black hair over his left ear, then ran a finger around the thick lip of his turtle neck sweater. He swatted an imaginary speck of dust from the lapel of his tweed jacket.

"The Temporal Genetic Desequencer had better work as advertised," he said. No matter how hard he forced his Bostonian accent, there was no disguising his Bronx origins.

"The Beast is online," I said.

His thick black eyebrows arched.

He was pissed. I could press his buttons and practically make his eyebrows dance. It was getting too easy.

"I will not have you referring to the Desequencer by that name," he decreed.

I smiled.

He glared.

After Reverend Jonathan Pilsner had announced to the world that God had revealed to him that the Desequencer was in fact the Beast, and that was with a capital B, the papers had had a field day. I can still remember the headline emblazoned across the supermarket tabloid: *Satan lives in Boston lab!* The only thing that beat us out that week was the story





about the woman who had eaten her own foot while trapped in a refrigerator for two weeks. That was how the great Scheffeld-Pilsner conflict had begun.

Scheffeld glanced at his gold Rolex, then back at me. "If he is punctual, he should be in the lobby."

He couldn't even bring himself to say Pilsner's name.

"I'll go down and get the Reverend," I said.

Scheffeld ignored me and studied something in his half-filled mug.

I was surprised. I had thought that the cockroach that had been scuttling around Scheffeld's mug had sunk to the bottom when I had poured the coffee. This was not a good omen.

\*\*\* \*\*

From the backside, Reverend Jonathan Pilsner looked like a man who had never missed a meal. His sharkskin slacks were stretched so tightly across his ample ass that I would have sworn they had been spray-painted on.

"Reverend Pilsner," I said.

He turned.

"I'm Timothy Henderson, Dr. Scheffeld's graduate student." I stuck out my hand.

Pilsner beamed. The man had more teeth than should have been genetically possible. "God be with you, Timmy," he said. Waddling forward, he grabbed my hand and pumped.

The only person who dared call me Timmy was my great-aunt Iola. She was a bitchy old woman who was known to kick field hands square in the balls when they didn't husk corn fast enough to suit her. I loved the old woman and therefore tolerated the indignity. Pilsner did not rate such an honor.

"Same to you, Johnny," I replied.

His Sunday-come-to-meeting smile didn't twitch, but his grip momentarily tightened, driving the stainless-steel cross on his ring into the back of my hand. "Thank you," he said sweetly.

The man was spooky.

Pilsner dropped my hand. He frowned. "Has the good Professor complied with the court order, and not activated the Beast?" he asked.

He shuddered when he said the Beast's name. He was genuinely frightened. Most Vid preachers were hustlers who spouted scripture to fatten their own bank accounts. Not Pilsner. He had the one quality that other Vid preachers would have sold their souls for — that is, if they hadn't already mortgaged them for their Beverly Hills mansions. Pilsner was sincere. He really believed. He also lived in a two-bedroom tract house in West LA with his wife, Cynthia, and son, Johnny Junior. The faithful knew that anyone who took in revenues of millions a month, but lived in a cracker box worth less than a hundred grand, was the real goods. The guy even drove an old Chevy. Every Sunday night he beat out two prime-time sex soaps. You had to be the real thing to hold an audience's attention when thirty-eight inches of silicone-reinforced mummies were only a channel away.

"He hasn't touched a thing, Johnny," I assured him. It was the truth. Scheffeld had not kept his hands off the Beast because of some court order, it was sim-

ply because he didn't know how to operate it. The Beast was my experiment, and built from my design. Scheffeld was the name that brought in the bucks, but I was the lab dog that made the Beast work.

"Shall we proceed then?" Pilsner asked solemnly.

It sounded as if he was setting off on an all-expenses-paid, three-day, two-night tour of hell. I was up for it.

"Let's hit it," I answered.

\*\*\*\*\*

One harvest, years ago, black thunderheads had appeared as if by magic. The wind stilled, and the air felt dead. Insect songs, having filled the field all morning, stopped with the type of sharp finality that told you something was about to happen. Our old hound, Blue, ceased his continual yapping. Then the world exploded in a white flash, and a bolt of lightning lanced down. The tractor took the hit, and hissed and crackled as all four tires exploded. They tell me that hail the size of walnuts pelted the field. Maybe so, but I didn't see it. I was out cold with the indentation of a tractor lugnut outlined across my forehead.

The lab was cloaked in the same type of silence. The crack of ice condensing over liquid nitrogen lines faded away. The dry whir of a shot bearing in an old muffin fan had silenced. A chattering relay steadied itself. The continual *gulp-gulp* of mechanical pumps quieted. I found myself nervously looking for flying lugnuts. None were to be seen. Then I knew what had caused the silence. Scheffeld and Pilsner stood in front of the Beast.

"An abomination," whispered Pilsner. A thin sheen of sweat covered his face. Pulling a worn cotton handkerchief from his jacket, he wiped his face with slow careful strokes. He caressed a carved wood cross that dangled from his throat.

Scheffeld's normal glare was guaranteed to make funding directors stutter and transform Senate science subcommittees into packs of bumbling idiots. The look that now filled his face would have seared a mere mortal to the bone. Pilsner, having a direct pipeline to God, might escape with only second-degree burns. Pulsing veins stood out from the sides of Scheffeld's throat. His cheeks flushed red, and the muscles at the base of his jaw twitched as he ground his teeth. He looked as if he had just swallowed a mouthful of maggoty meat and was eager for more. "Religious maniac," he hissed at Pilsner.

Had they been any closer together, I'm sure that the tension between them would have broken down the air that separated them, reducing them to smoking cinders.

"I have to start the cameras," I said.

Both men offered up one final death-wish glare, then turned their backs to one another. Once again I could hear the friendly noises of the lab.

Walking over to the first bank of rack panels, which covered an entire wall adjacent the Beast, I flipped the toggle that started the lab recording system. An automatic telephoto whirled as it focused on the two men.

"We are on," I said softly. This had been the only thing that both had been able to agree upon. Neither

wanted the press present at the first activation of the Beast, yet both wanted the procedure fully recorded so they could later dissect and edit the proceedings to sway their respective flocks. My desires were meaningless to both these men, but I needed the recording for my thesis.

"Opening statements," I said. Scheffeld had lost the toss and had to go first, leaving Pilsner to rebut whatever the Professor said. Pilsner reluctantly walked to the side of the lab. I was sure that the idea of a live camera that was not focused on him was pure hell. I enjoyed that thought.

Scheffeld had transformed himself. "What you see behind me," he said as he waved his hand to his side, "is the culmination of a three-hundred-thousand-year quest of man in search of himself." His dark eyes were soft and gentle. He radiated intelligence and warmth.

I glanced over at Pilsner. The man squirmed as if something slithered in his shorts.

"We call it the Temporal Genetic Desequencer," said Scheffeld, "but you can think of it as a window into our past." He walked over to the Beast and patted the front of her holo tube. "In concept and design the Desequencer is actually quite simple," he said. He offered his patented public broadcasting smile.

Simple my ass. It had taken me over three years in design and construction.

"I'm certain that you all recognize the holo tube," he said while patting the glass again, "but what lies behind it is something that has never been seen before." He sidestepped so that the camera could scan the Beast's stainless-steel brain. He pointed at one of the countless optical fibers sunk into the polished hemisphere. "These thousands of communication links descend to Micro-Cray computers, which fill several floors beneath us." He let the audience ponder this for a moment. "The output of each of those powerful machines is fed in parallel into the Desequencer's central processor." He affectionately patted the Beast. "Inside this one-meter sphere, superconducting circuits are cooled to liquid nitrogen temperature, thereby increasing their computing speed to nearly the speed of light. This is the most powerful computer on Earth!" He raised his eyes towards the ceiling.

The audience would look at his now-angelic expression and imagine that Scheffeld saw God smiling down on him. I had long ago taped a Miss Corn Huskers pin-up directly above the Beast. I'm certain that this was the first time he had seen it. No hint of the heavenly body he was gazing upon showed on his face. Scheffeld might have been a schmuck, but he was also a pro.

He looked back into the camera. "And what have we fed into this mighty computer?" he asked. "The very essence of man," he announced solemnly. "The genetic makeup of more than a billion of Earth's people resides within this machine. The DNA recording of most of you watching at this very moment lies hidden within the depths of its memory." Again he let them ponder this.

Scheffeld knew his audience. People watching

public television liked to search for deep meaning in trivial facts.

"Each of you shares the nuclear DNA of both your parents; however, within each cell of your body is a place where a special type of DNA sleeps, waiting for us to unlock its message. The DNA of the mitochondria is only inherited from the female. Yours is the same as your mother's, and hers the same as her mother's. This unbroken chain would travel back to infinity, except for one simple fact."

Another ponder break.

"Mutation," he said. "The engine that drives evolution. By using this mighty computer to compare the mitochondrial DNA of a billion humans, we can trace back our ancestry generation by generation, mutation through mutation, until we arrive to that ancestor common to us all. Anthropologists have determined beyond doubt that modern man sprang some three hundred thousand years ago from an isolated group of proto-humans that lived on the plains of Africa."

Scheffeld glanced at Pilsner. The Reverend looked like he had been sucking on lemons. He clenched the cross around his throat in a death grip. I don't think he was a happy man.

"With the Desequencer," continued Scheffeld, "we will travel back in time and see what the mother to us all looked like. Our original mother would not have had the throat constriction to speak as we do, but with the aid of the Micro-Crays, the computer will translate her simple language and body movements into language that we will understand. And through the computer, we will be able to speak to her. In just a few moments, you will meet the true Eve, the mother of the human race."

Pilsner squeaked like a mouse that had just been knocked across the floor by a cat. His red, chubby face quivered.

"But first," said Scheffeld, "in the interest of fairness, I have asked someone with an alternate viewpoint to offer us his perspective."

I had to give him credit. Scheffeld's smile did not crack. Pilsner had taken Scheffeld to court, claiming that, since public money had been spent on this project, the public deserved an alternate interpretation as to the results. The state supreme court agreed. This had not really been an issue of religion versus science. Judges were appointed by elected officials, and Pilsner owned the hearts and souls of quite a few voters. The judge was no idiot.

Scheffeld bowed slightly from the waist, then offered his hand in Pilsner's direction. Before he turned from the camera, he arched his left eyebrow. I had known that that would be his parting shot. It was his trademark. Without saying a word, he had just told his audience that they were about to witness an ignorant fool, the type of man who believed that the earth was flat, and that the Mars 1 landing had actually been done on a Moscow sound stage.

Pilsner walked slowly before the camera, glanced over his shoulder toward the Beast, then looked back at the camera. "Thank you for the opportunity, Dr.



Flaming 87



Scheffeld," he said. "What you see behind me is not truly the Beast," Pilsner almost whispered, "but an amazing construction devised by the best minds of the scientific establishment."

He smiled.

I almost found myself smiling back.

"However," he said, "in the cold, harsh light of logic, they have forgotten one simple fact."

Pausing, he reached into his jacket, and pulled out a small, black-covered book. He held the book up before the camera. "Through the Bible, God speaks to us. We were created in His image. That is simple fact. It stretches my intelligence to the breaking point to believe that man mutated from some ape-like creature. God is not devious. He wanted man, so He simply created him. There is no need to fabricate a maze of twisted logic, mitochondrial DNA, and genetic mutation to explain man. We are here, and the way we are, because God has willed it."

He walked to the side of the Beast. "This machine, marvelous as it is, was built by man, and is subject to the errors and biases that man suffers from. This machine can bring forth whatever its builders wish. Blinded by their science, they believe that man sprang from an ape, and then built a machine to prove this. What you will see is a computer simulation, a cartoon character from the Saturday morning Vids. They will claim it is Eve."

Again he held up his Bible.

"Our faith will not be shattered by the hologram of some cartoonish ape. We are too intelligent, and our faith too strong, to be swayed by this demonstration. I ask you to pray for these men of science as I have, that they too may see the truth as we have seen it."

He slipped the Bible back into his pocket.

"Thank you," he said gently, then walked from the camera. His face had turned slightly pale and his stride was not as sure as when he had first walked before the camera.

I shook my head and blinked several times. Pilsner was so sincere, and his faith so obviously strong, I had felt myself being pulled into his words. I had built the damn machine, but still, I had felt the strength of his words. I shook my head again. It seemed to break the trance this time. I had built the Beast. This was no biased experiment. This was the truth.

Scheffeld returned to the Beast. "Please activate the Desequencer," he said.

The program, along with the DNA data, had been loaded into the Micro-Crays for weeks. All my test programs had worked perfectly, including the bluebird that I had desequenced all the way back to a green, feathered lizard. Nothing could go wrong. My index finger hovered over the main-boot switch.

The switch snapped on at my touch. Lights blinked on as the Micro-Crays uploaded. A swirl of salt-and-pepper snow filled the halo tube.

Pilsner sat down next to me. Beads of sweat covered his forehead. He stared toward the halo tube. His eyes were large and his look glazed. His hands seemed to control their own movements, and randomly wandered across the edge of the control panel and

towards my open tool box. "It's Satan's work," he whispered. "It can't be true." He continued to stare toward the tube.

I turned back towards the Beast. Something moved in the tube. It was small, about four and a half feet tall. It was not exactly furry, but was covered with wispy brown hair. Flat breasts hung down her chest. Long black hair almost hid her face. From her one visible dark eye, she stared into the lab. With the back of her palm she touched the center of her chest. She barked and grunted like a baboon.

"I am Eve," said the computer in flat, dead tones, as it interpreted her movements and sounds and assigned to her the name we had already chosen.

She then scratched her belly with the thick dark nails of her left hand.

"This is the ancestor common to us all!" shouted Scheffeld. The bangs of his own dark hair had fallen over his eyes. I knew he could smell a ten-part PBS special coming out of this.

"No," said Pilsner in a squeaky, cracked voice. He stood, and, clenched in his fist, he held a large screwdriver. His eyes were impossibly large, and a trickle of blood ran down his chin from where he had bitten into his lip.

"Notice the almost ape-like stance," I heard Scheffeld say. "See how the knees don't quite lock erect."

I couldn't take my eyes away from Pilsner. A single drop of blood rolled from his chin and hit the control panel. He turned and looked at me with frightened eyes.

"I never believed it would *really* happen," he mumbled. "How could God have allowed such a thing?" He looked back at the halo, then again at me. "Can it be true?" he whispered.

I nodded slowly. In that instant, I knew that Pilsner truly believed what he was seeing.

"The eyes are extremely close set," said Scheffeld.

In a single swift move, Pilsner jerked the screwdriver high above his head, then threw it.

Twirling end over end, the sharp tip spiraled toward the halo tube.

Scheffeld stepped forward. "See how human-like the hands are." He turned and smiled at the camera.

The screwdriver flew true. The sharp end caught Scheffeld in the right eye, and drove through his head. Something moist splattered, then dripped down the front of the halo tube. Scheffeld blinked once from his remaining eye, then crumbled to the ground.

I barely breathed. Unable to accept the impossible act I had just witnessed, I felt my brain slip into a state of detached, analytic rationality. I had overloaded.

The Beast's interactive computer program caught Scheffeld's movement as he hit the floor, and moved Eve to stare down at him. Clenching her fist and holding it above her head, she thrust down, slapping herself in the chest, then lifted her fingers towards her mouth. Her jaw worked back and forth.

"Kill! Eat food!" said the computer. Working within the confines of Eve's world, the program had

# Starting the year with a bang

The 1988 Spectra list is the most exciting science fiction and fantasy list Bantam has ever published (he said modestly). And the first four months get it off to quite a start.

**JANUARY:** Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman write incredible epic fantasy sagas. I mean, you could *live* in their *Dragonlance Legends* trilogy. Well, now they're publishing with us and their new novel, *Forging the Darksword* begins their *Darksword Trilogy* in grand fashion. Lots of people had wonderful things to say about George Alec Effinger's *When Gravity Falls* when it was published in hardcover. It's now available in paperback and if you haven't read it yet, you're in for a real treat. Speaking of treats, readers were absolutely amazed that a work as accomplished as Robert Charles Wilson's *A Hidden Place* was a first novel. But now his new novel, *Memory Wire* is out and they're realizing that his first book just gave a hint at how extraordinary he was going to be (Orson Scott Card called *Memory Wire* "a profound and beautiful work of art"). Also out this month is *The Rebel Dynasty, Volume Two*, two of F.M. Busby's terrific Hulzein novels (*The Alien Debt* and *Rebel's Seed*) in one book.

**FEBRUARY:** Ian MacDonald is a one-of-a-kind writer. His short fiction was so distinctive that it garnered him a nomination for the John W. Campbell Award. His first novel, *Desolation Road* is simply brilliant. *Locus* calls it "spectacular," and Philip José Farmer said it was "extraordinary and more than that." Who's to argue? In February, in addition to publishing *Desolation Road*, we've collected Ian's stories (including some never before in print) in a volume entitled *Empire Dreams*. The month hardly stops there, though. There's Parke Godwin's gorgeous contemporary fantasy, *A Truce with Time* in hardcover. It's touching, poignant and funny. And there's Warren Norwood's first fantasy novel, *True Jaguar*, which Anne McCaffrey calls "smashing good." And there's the second volume in Roger Zelazny's exciting *Alien Speedway* series, *Pitfall*, written by Thomas Wylde.

## JANUARY



## FEBRUARY



**MARCH:** F.M. Busby's been writing power-packed sf novels for years (*Rissa Kerguelen*, *Star Rebel*, *Rebel's Seed* and *The Demu Trilogy*, to name a few). In March, he really stretches out with his most ambitious work to date, *The Breeds of Man*. It's a knockout story about humanity's next step on the evolutionary ladder which Janet Morris calls "a major accomplishment by a writer of real ability." March also marks the publication of the second volume in Jonathan Wylie's *Servants of Ark* fantasy trilogy, *The Center of the Circle*. Responses to the first volume in this series, *The First Named* (which we published in November) have been uniformly enthusiastic. We also have Richard Bowker's cunning novel of psychic detection, *Marlborough Street*, and two Elizabeth Scarborough humorous fantasies (*Bronwyn's Bane* and *The Christening Quest*) in one volume, which we call *Songs from the Seashell Archives, Volume Two* (we published Volume One in October).

**APRIL:** A while back, I called Frederik Pohl's *Chernobyl* one of the most important novels of the year. It seems that quite a few people agree with me. Everyone from the *New York Times Book Review* to the *Chicago Sun-Times* to the *San Francisco Chronicle* to the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* has said wonderful things about it and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* even said it was "arguably the best Frederik Pohl has ever written." This April, it will be available in paperback and, if you haven't read it yet, you'll have a chance to find out what all the fuss is about. There are also two very strong novels by terrific young writers in April. *Neon Lotus* by Mark Laidlaw is a fascinating journey to the roof of the world. And Daniel Keys Moran's *The Armageddon Blues* is a truly gripping tale about a woman who travels 700 years to prevent a nuclear disaster. Also this month is the first one-volume publication of three of Robert Silverberg's finest, *The Masks of Time*, *Born with the Dead* and *Dying Inside*.

There's a lot of great stuff here. And you'll be amazed to hear what's coming in the spring. But that's for another letter...

Enjoy,

Publisher, Bantam Spectra Books



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## MARCH



## APRIL



determined that Scheffeld was the victim of a successful hunt.

Pilsner dropped back into his chair. "No!" he screamed at the holo. Veins pulsed through the thick skin of his forehead. "It was an accident," he whispered to himself in very unconvincing tones. He stared at the blood from his split lip, which now covered his fingertips.

Eve looked down at Scheffeld, then at us. Once again she held her clenched fist high above her head then thrust it down towards her chest. The instant before she would have slapped herself, she grabbed her fist with her other hand.

"No kill," interpreted the computer in emotionless tones.

I turned toward Pilsner.

His body convulsed, and the left half of his face hardened and froze. Tears ran from his right eye. His lips twitched. "What did she say?" he mumbled.

"No kill," I told him. It made perfect sense to me. To kill when food wasn't needed was to take a risk without any possible reward. The meek survived to evolve, while the risk takers became extinct.

Pilsner's right hand locked around my wrist. His lips twisted into a crooked smile. "Thou shalt not kill," he mumbled. Tears streaked his face. "She knows. God has touched her."

It was obvious to me that Pilsner had warped the computer's interpretation of Eve's movements into something to salvage his own faith. A proto-human from three hundred thousand years ago could have no concept of the Ten Commandments. Eve's actions were simply dictated by the need of her genes to propagate, and not by divine intervention.

"Her actions are in response to survival instincts," I told him.

Pilsner shook his head in spasmed jerks. "No," he said. "You must have faith."

His hold on my wrist went slack.

Sliding from his chair, Pilsner hit the floor. He didn't move. I couldn't see his chest rise.

Finally shocked into action, I grabbed the phone from the console and hit the alarm. It didn't even get through the first ring when it was picked up.

"Emergency," said an efficient voice.

I almost spoke, but movement in the holo tube caught my attention. Eve stared at me. For just an instant, as I looked into her eyes, I thought I saw something more than just a computer simulation constructed from strands of desequenced mitochondrial DNA. I shook my head trying to clear my vision. Then, with a slap of my hand against the console, I severed the computer link.

Eve winked out.

"Medical emergency," I said into the phone. "Two men are down in the Beast lab."

"Acknowledged," replied the voice.

The phone went dead.

I took one quick glance at the holo tube and, feeling an irrational sense of relief that it was still empty, I bent over to help Pilsner.

— ABO —

# Our Renewal Policy

Because we have a small staff and putting out a renewal mailing takes a lot of time and energy we'd rather spend improving the magazine, we have decided to let you help us — and help yourself at the same time. Our renewal rate is the same as our regular subscription rate — if we have to renew you. If you renew yourself, however, you can save at least \$2 or more. We figure you are smarter than the subscribers to most other magazines and will recognize a good idea when you see it. There is a catch, of course — you have to self-renew before we send you a renewal notice. The sample label in the space below shows where to look for the expiration number of your subscription (we've circled it here) as it should appear on your mailing label. If you look at your label, the number tells you which is your last issue. This is issue No. 8. The subscription in the sample below would expire on issue No. 12 (the last issue number is the number at the far left on the line below "3-digit" — the number is circled. 3-Digit could also read 5-Digit, or all for state or mixed state.)

(Last issue number)

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Mr/Mrs Abo Subscriber  
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We will accept the special self-renewals from those whose subscription ends with issues number 8 through 10 up until Feb. 1, 1988 (determined by the U.S. Postal Service postmark on the letter). After that, those whose subscription expires with the 10th issue will have to pay the regular, new subscriber rate to renew. The deadline for those whose subscriptions end with issue number 11 (our July-Aug. 1988 issue) is March 1, 1988, and so on. Of course the simplest way of taking advantage of this unique offer (we think this may be a new idea) is to fill out your renewal form below right now and to send it to us with your payment. Payment must accompany renewal orders to get the discounted rate.

Naturally, we realize some of our readers who are not yet subscribers may think this is a neat way of getting a subscription at a discount. But you won't fool our computer. If you aren't in our computer, then we'll only credit your subscription with the number of copies your payment would cover at the regular subscription rate. We do that for two reasons. The first is that the self-renewal rate is only offered to our loyal (and smart) subscribers. The second is that our circulation department will get miffed if they have to search for a non-existent name in the computer.

Why should new subscribers pay more than those who renew? Simple. It costs us even more money to get each new subscriber than it costs to get someone to renew. We think it's only fair that the price a person pays should reflect the cost of providing the service.

Why should you renew? Great stories. Great full-color art. If you've been reading Aboriginal SF you already know that and you don't want to miss an issue.

The special self-renewal subscription rate is \$10 for 6 issues, \$20 for 12 issues, or \$28 for 18 issues. But if we have to notify you by mail that your subscription is about to expire, the renewal rate will be \$12 for 6 issues, \$22 for 12 issues or \$30 for 18 issues. Why pay the higher rate? Renew now!





## EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

# Surprise!

Surprise!

What you hold in your hands is the culmination of a long, uphill battle and the fulfillment of a promise we made in our first issue. And we've given it to you earlier than originally planned or announced.

In an immediate sense, it has taken us from November 1985, when we first announced we were going to publish *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, until now to produce this country's first successful full-color, full-slick science fiction magazine.

In a more historic sense, I started out on this road in the summer of 1975 when I was chosen to edit a magazine called *Galileo*. *Galileo* also hoped to grow into a full-color, full-slick magazine, but ran into a number of disasters on the business side of the operation. Most people never knew that all the art for *Galileo* was done in color. The magazine just never got far enough along financially to print the art in color.

We have. We haven't made a profit. That's still a year or two away. But we are certain it will come. We are certain it will come because of a great deal of hard work and 100-hour weeks by staff members. We are certain it will come because of you — our subscribers. Some members of my staff think we shouldn't keep you informed of all this detail, but I disagree. In a very real sense, this is your magazine as much as ours. When you subscribe or renew your subscription (hint, hint), we take the money and put it right back into the magazine, not our pockets. We plan to continue doing that until this is the

best magazine in the field — it's already the best looking.

We could not have gotten to this point without you. You took a risk on a new magazine with a funny name. You took a risk on a new product that made a lot of promises. We think we've kept most of them. We intend to keep more.

Originally, we thought full slick was at least four or five issues away and that all we would have for you this issue was a slick cover. But we were able to find several printers who let us bring our dream time (see Editor's Notes in issue No. 1) magazine to you a little sooner. We hope you like it.

We had hoped to have Ben Bova's novelette in this issue, but had to move it back to next issue, when it will definitely run with some more great art by Bob Eggleton, who did a terrific job for this cover.

With this issue we have also supplemented Darrell Schweitzer's book review column with another book review column by Janice Eisen, who has been one of our staff members since the second issue.

Why two book review columns? Because there are more than 1,000 science fiction/fantasy books published each year and it's impossible for one reviewer to keep up. It's also impossible for anyone to read them all (it would mean reading three or more books a day), so the more reviews we run, the easier it is for you to choose the books you want to read.

Where do we go from here?

Stick around and see...

Since I have a bit of space

left, I'll take a moment for a comment on the state of the art and some crass commercialism. It is very expensive to put out a full-slick, full-color magazine, which is one reason why you don't see any other science fiction publisher doing it.

Yet, for decades now, professionals in the field have been saying, "What we really need is a nice slick science fiction magazine..."

We've done it. And, believe it or not, we can continue doing it, because science fiction readers know what they like and more and more every day like *Aboriginal Science Fiction*.

One of two publishers have realized what we are up to and have scheduled ads with us because we can give them the large-format and attractive display they need to promote their books. They would like to see *Aboriginal Science Fiction* succeed. We appreciate the support from Bantam/Spectra and Houghton Mifflin and hope you will consider the products they offer.

If we get more advertising, it will mean we can make *Aboriginal Science Fiction* even better in a number of ways. If we get six more full-page ads, for instance, we can add another 16 pages and more stories and articles.

As a subscriber or reader, you can help if you go to a science fiction convention by asking book publishers, "How come you aren't advertising in *Aboriginal Science Fiction*?" Or, feel free to send them a letter — their addresses are on the books you buy. By doing so, you'll help us give you a better magazine.

## BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer

# Mythologizing



*The Urth of the New Sun*  
By Gene Wolfe  
Tor, 1987  
\$17.95

Someone once said of Cordwainer Smith's work that it did not so much tell of the future as it would be, but as it would be remembered. Smith wrote of the legends of the near and far future, some of them on the verge of becoming myths.

Gene Wolfe writes of the future as it will be told, in primal mythology, and in more sophisticated literary works based on the mythology of some almost unimaginably distant epoch. *The Book of the New Sun* needs no introduction here. Most of you have read it. Virtually all of you have at least heard of it. Suffice it to say that *The Book of the New Sun* is the *Odyssey* of remote futurity.

Now we have a sequel, and it's the future *Divine Comedy*, or maybe just the *New Testament*. It is a sequel to the earlier, four-volume work, in which Severian the Torturer, now Severian the Autarch, journeys to the stars to be tested and (if he passes) return with the New Sun and redeem the Earth. It is a profound, cosmic journey, filled with mystery, in which Severian passes into realms he cannot hope to truly understand, reaching, if not the throne of God, something close to that. At the same time, *The Urth of the New Sun*, like *The*

*Book of the New Sun*, hovers right on the edge of science fiction and fantasy, its "science" so far removed into futurity that such terms as "supernatural" cease to have any meaning.

Wolfe is, I think, the greatest of all writers of the "antique



future," that future so far removed in time that it has the feel of the remote past. We associate this more with fantasy than with science fiction, I suspect, because such stories inevitably deal in myth, a subject many SF writers shy away from.

It's a long tradition, drawing its first hints from *The Time Machine*, but coming into full development with William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land* (1912), Clark Ashton Smith's Zothique stories (in *Weird Tales* in the '30s), Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth* (1950), and many more. I've worked in this area myself. My own *The Shattered Goddess* is an antique-future fantasy, its su-

pernaturalism overt and explicit, like Smith's Zothique, Hodgson, Smith, or Vance. We do it, all of us — my betters and I — because there are certain myths, certain metaphors of the ultimate fate of mankind, of Time (capitalized as Lord Dunsany would have had it, when he, too, touched on such matters) and history which simply will not work in a story set in a timeless past, or even a quasi-historical Celtic/Greek/Norse/Japanese/whatever world. We turn to the future, but to prophesy rather than to extrapolate.

Wolfe is using the same technique as in *Soldier of the Mist*, writing from a native point of view so that things that seem supernatural to the characters are presented as supernatural, whether we the readers have other ideas or not. The whole first half of *The Urth of the New Sun* takes place on a spaceship, a miles-long, solar-sail powered vessel that "passes through time like a needle through cloth" and that carries him out of the known universe altogether. This is, to Severian, very much the sort of experience Dante was having on his own celebrated pilgrimage. Severian comes to a planet, then an island. He sees an archipelago and is told that each island is in charge of a whole galaxy back in our universe. He meets superior and mysterious beings, who would certainly be "gods" in any conventional mythology. To Severian, all these things are equally fantastic and there is no distinction between superscience and supernaturalism.

The result is that Wolfe has created both a powerful myth and the most convincingly lived-in

### RATING SYSTEM

☆☆☆☆  
☆☆☆☆  
☆☆☆☆  
☆☆  
☆

Outstanding  
Very good  
Good  
Fair  
Poor

remote future ever. Such antique futures often glimmer before us like visions; Wolfe's is as solid as a dirt floor and all the more vivid for being so.

This is a rich book, but not an easy read. Wolfe is, I think, excessively murky at times. There are scenes, or sometimes single sentences, that I don't understand. Sometimes I go looking for antecedents — something is referred to as if already present and accounted for — and never find them. Sometimes I am not sure if the obscure references are from the previous four volumes — which I have read but not memorized — or from some minor detail in this one that slipped by even as I read. An impatient reader may well put the book aside.

But the patient reader will be well rewarded, both for the unique vision and for the elegance of Wolfe's prose. Also, this is in many ways a better structured work than its predecessor. There is rising action and rising tension from beginning to end. *The Citadel of the Autarch*, by contrast, was a slow roll downhill, possessing more the fascination of an intricate Oriental landscape painting than of distinct drama.

And, for time-travel fans, *The Urth of the New Sun* works some of the most baroque variations of the time-travel premise ever, as that needle of a starship neatly threads the narrative back among the strands of *The Book of the New Sun* in surprising ways.

Rating: ☆☆☆

#### *Wizardry and Wild Romance*

By Michael Moorcock  
Gollancz, 1987

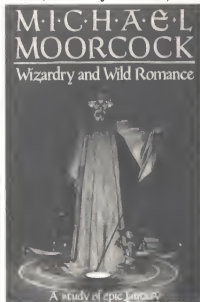
160 pp., 10 pounds, 95 pence

Subtitled "a study of epic fantasy," this is one of the most important books ever to appear on the subject of what we loosely call "sword and sorcery" or "Tolkienesque fantasy" or even "generic fantasy," both for the quality of its insights and because it is written by such an important practitioner of the very art it sets out to examine. Even where it is wrong-headed, it is of interest because of the insight this gives

us into Moorcock's own thinking and writing. If some academic had said the same things, he would merely be wrong-headed.

Moorcock, I am happy to report, meets the first criterion for such books: he gets his facts straight. This hasn't always been the case, such as when he completely defused a blistering attack on science fiction in "Starship Stormtroopers" (in *The Opium General*) by holding up *Starship Troopers* as the epitome of all that was repugnant and morally bankrupt in Campbellian SF. (Embarrassing, because you can read Campbell's rejection of same in his collected letters; on many points, he agreed with Moorcock.)

So, no major errors, and



Moorcock's opinions are expressed clearly, even pithily, as he covers the development of fantasy from the "decadent" post-medieval romances up to the contemporary generic product. He begins with the origins, then devotes chapters to the development of various aspects of the heroic fantasy tale — e.g., "Heroes and Heroines" and "Landscapes," — and, interestingly enough, repeats the claim he originally made around 1964, that science fiction has been largely worked out, and the heroic fantasy is, overall, a more flexible and open-ended form. He is a great admirer of Peake and T.H. White, tolerant of Howard and Dunsany, but tells us that the

romances of William Morris "have nothing to offer to the modern reader." (So I wonder why they are still read. Lin Carter has said that Morris was one of the best sellers in the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series.) Among the contemporaries, he has much praise for Fritz Leiber (as the greatest living fantasist), M. John Harrison, Gene Wolfe, Robin McKinley, Susan Cooper, Ursula LeGuin (the *Earthsea* books) and a few others. The cookie-cutter generic quest-novel writers (Terry Brooks, et al.) are dismissed without being named.

One feels an irresistible urge to quote:

"The magical and supernatural elements in the great epics rarely dominated the human conflict. They served symbolically, to heighten it. To modern readers of these epics, the weighty narrative machinery, the dialogues and diversions, the archaisms are forgotten as the story gathers force, finding constant echoes in the readers' own experience, resonances in their remembered dreams. Though concerned with deeds of daring, magic, (and) human love, there are no such resonances in the decadent Romance and so a modern reader's interest soon flags. To keep them reading such a book must be written in a more or less idiomatic language, in a certain kind of undemanding tone, for it is offering nothing but sensation and escapism" (page 24).

I find that I tend to agree more with Moorcock's observations than with his conclusions. Here he had succinctly defined what the very best fantasies do — they partake of those characteristics of the epic he has described — but then he goes on to pretty much define the field by its failures, claiming that modern fantasy is another species of decadent Romance of little lasting importance.

The most decadent of the lot, says Moorcock, is *The Lord of the Rings*, a work of "corrupt romanticism," even "a pernicious confirmation of the values of the morally bankrupt middle-class" which are "primarily responsible for the problems England now

faces." And so on, a whole chapter being devoted to the demolition of Tolkien and everything he stands for ("Winnie-the-Pooh posing as an epic").

But even if we overlook Moorcock's obvious anti-Christian bias (he also detests C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams) and his Britain-specific socio-political ideas ("provincial" is the word that springs to mind — probably not quite appropriate here), we are still faced with the fact that large numbers of intelligent and sensitive readers have found in *The Lord of the Rings* those very characteristics that distinguish the true epic: the deep resonances in remembered experiences and dreams. My own feeling is that the verdict is not yet in. Give Tolkien another half century. If he fades into unreadability, then Moorcock was right. If not, not.

In any case, the *observation* is useful, even if the conclusion is open to question.

Here's another observation I particularly like, from the chapter on "Wit and Humor":

"There is a specific method employed by bad writers to avoid the implications of their subject matter, to reduce the tensions, to minimize the importance of themes which they might, in pretending to write a serious book, inadvertently touch upon. This is the joke which specifically indicates to the reader that the story is not really 'true.' I am reminded of my favorite line from Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* where the daughter of the family, undergoing painful and primitive childbirth, pauses in her efforts to speak to her father. 'Sorry about the sound-effects, daddy,' she remarks with stoic cheer" (p. 108).

Actually, I notice this the most in bad movies and TV. It's why I can't watch *Moonlighting* and why the Roger Moore James Bond movies never manage to hold interest on any level beyond superficial gimmickry. But, yes, a crack like that can completely puncture a fantasy story, too.

The chapter on humor is the most original and worthwhile in

the whole book. Moorcock understands real humor, as opposed to jokes, and how it is often linked to the most tragic subject matter. He says of Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy:

"Even ... the infamous Steerpike is made to behave somewhat ridiculously on occasions, and when he takes his revenge on innocence — on those at whom we have laughed in earlier chapters — their plight is all the harder to endure; the pathos and misery of their situation is amplified and we see their fate in an altogether changed light. This is what the genuine comic writer can do, time after time. He or she can make us laugh only to pause with shock at the recognition of what we are actually

show, by means of image, metaphor, elements of allegory, what human life is actually about" (p. 113).

Which is, I think, the last word on the subject of escapism.

Rating: ☆☆☆

## Anthologies and Collections

Either it's the season for them or just a coincidence, but one way or the other I suddenly have several books of short stories I want to tell you about:

### *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*

By Ursula K. LeGuin  
Capra Press, 1987  
196 pp., \$15.95

This is a minor Le Guin collection, certainly, a gathering of stories and poems having to do (loosely) with animals. Many have been collected before. Others will certainly be familiar to most readers. One major new item, the title novelette "Buffalo Gals Won't You Come Out Tonight," is something of a disappointment, a longish, rambling tale of a child lost in the desert and kept by a community of animal spirits who appear to her both as animals and as squalid, primitive, vaguely Native American humans. The problem is that we (or I in any case) don't feel what the author intends to convey. This is another romance of the primitive, anti-technological, back-to-nature genre, even more so than the recent *Always Coming Home*. We are supposed to side with the animals/women/Indians against the vile ways of civilization/men/white folks, but she just hasn't made her case.

The other stories include "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," "Mazes," "The Direction of the Road," "The Wife's Story," and the lovely, uncollected metafiction "May's Lion" (from *The Little Magazine*). Some show Le Guin at her best.

Rating: ☆☆

### *Scars*

By Richard Christian Matheson  
Scream Press, 1987  
168 pp., \$20.00

## BUFFALO GALS

And Other Animal Presences



URSULA K. LE GUIN

laughing at: misery, despair, loneliness, humiliation, the fact of death" (p. 109).

I'm only disappointed that Moorcock doesn't seem to be aware of the fantasies of Mervyn Wall, whose *The Unfortunate Fursey* and *The Return of Fursey* are among the most brilliant exercises in laughter to avoid weeping ever written.

And one more quote, which I think should be the credo of anyone trying to do serious work in fantasy:

"... a work of fantasy must, like all good fiction, be something more than aesthetically pleasing.... It should have at its source some fundamental concern for human beings, some ambition to



Richard Christian Matheson is a screenwriter who produces occasional, very short horror/fantasy stories. He is, of course, the son of Richard Matheson the Elder, and will probably one day get tired of people pointing out that his work shouldn't be confused with his father's, but it's true: he has a unique style and approach. Virtually all his stories are snapper-ending tales, but not jokes or gimmicks. Usually the endings reveal appalling, senseless tragedy. They start out with one or two people in a situation, develop as character sketches, then *bang*, somebody gets it. The characters are trapped in hells either of their own making or randomly distributed. It's hard to describe particular stories in detail without giving away the (quite legitimate) surprise endings, but the strength of these stories is that they're worth rereading after you know what the ending is. Frequently, the logical, organic growth of the ending out of the story itself is only apparent on the second time through. Pay special attention to one called "Red," which almost doesn't make sense on first reading. Once you get to the end, the whole thing is stunning, shocking, unbearable.

Of course the short-story story is a very limited form, and Matheson will have to move on to something else (three or four volumes of these would become repetitious and dull, I suspect), but let's give credit where it's due. He's an absolute master of this specific type of story.

Rating: ☆☆☆

#### *Masques II*

Edited by J.N. Williamson  
MacLay, 1987  
221 pp., \$19.95

This is an odd-looking book, in silver-foil covered boards, without a dustjacket, without any discernable blurbs or promotional material. Thus it is likely to have only a very limited circulation, which is a shame because it deserves more as the successor to the celebrated *Masques*, which contained several very noteworthy stories, including the near-

classic "Nightcrawlers," by Robert McCammon.

This one doesn't seem to contain any classics, but the major names in horror fiction are present with competent and better stories. Stephen King's "Popsy" is so-so, but has a few nice touches as a procurer for a child molester accidentally picks up a vampire kid in a shopping mall. "The New Season," by Robert Bloch, is about a TV personality trapped in a world of increasingly mechanized production. Richard Matheson presents two short nasties, one very much in the old *Twilight Zone* tradition. Former *Night Cry* editor Alan Rodgers begins a story you think is going to turn out to be just marvelous — about a real kid, his childhood



realistically depicted, who just happens to come back from the dead — but then the tone changes and the tale becomes vaguely unsatisfactory science fiction. But it's still a great beginning.

Probably the most interesting item overall is Douglas Winter's "Splatler, a Cautionary Tale," which takes J.G. Ballard's "condensed novel" form and (I'm sure someone is going to go through the roof as I say this) shows us how it can be done right. Ballard's little collages of titled paragraphs tended to be merely incoherent, without content. Winter in the same format deftly orchestrates his allusions into a mordant parable about horror fiction, films, and censorship.

Also present are Richard Christian Matheson, William F. Nolan, Ramsey Campbell, James Herbert, Charles Saunders, Steve Rasnic Tem, and editor Williamson himself.

Rating: ☆☆☆

#### *Valley So Low*

By Manly Wade Wellman  
Doubleday, 1987  
212 pp., \$12.95

Subtitled "Southern Mountain Stories," this will be the last Manly Wade Wellman book, save perhaps for other posthumous collections. Wellman actually had a contract with Doubleday for another John the Balladeer novel, but was too ill to write it. So now, after Manly's death, Karl Edward Wagner has assembled this volume of his recent Southern regional fantasies, reprinted from *F&SF*, *Whispers*, *Kadath*, and various other magazines and anthologies. Wellman always had a fine ear for Southern American English and did for the Appalachian speech and culture what Kipling did for Cockney. As a fantasist he tended to be strong on background and atmosphere and a bit weak on plot. Too many of his spooks and menaces are briefly encountered, then laid to rest too easily; but certainly some of the stories in *Valley So Low* are his best, and if you read them slowly, a few at a time, the somewhat predictable endings won't begin to get tiresome. Appropriately, the book contains the last John the Balladeer stories, which are worthy to stand with those in Wellman's one classic, *Who Fears the Devil?*

Rating: ☆☆☆

#### *The Essential Ellison*

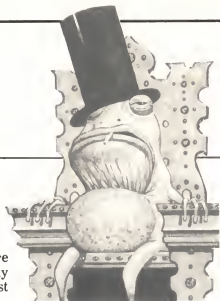
Edited by Terry Dowling,  
with Richard Delap & Gil Lamont  
The Nemo Press, 1987  
1019 pp., \$60.00 (deluxe edition),  
\$30.00 (trade edition)

In sheer pages-per-penny, this enormous book is an enormous bargain, but it's more than bulk. It's a one-volume summation of Harlan Ellison's career, from juvenilia through his most

(Continued to page 23)

# A Message From Our Alien Publisher

## Eh?



The human species is approximately six million years old. (The creatures themselves would date their actual speciation at about half a million years ago, but they perceive differences between themselves and the earlier primates that you and I would hardly notice.) Three million years ago, as you well know, the intragalactic paroxysm touched a group of apes and created what human anthropologists call an osteodontokeratic culture. That simply means a technology based on bones, teeth, and hair. (The creation of long words to cover short ideas is a common human display ritual.)

You will remember that the origin of the bone, tooth, and hair technology was fancifully portrayed in a film we picked up some years ago called *2001*, written by a human prophet known as Arthur C. Clarke. We found Clarke's monoliths to be hilarious, but the basic scenario of stellar influence on human development was surprisingly accurate.

Obviously, human development did not stop with hair, teeth, and bones. In less than a million years, the creatures had elaborated on what they'd been given, creating a more lasting technology based on stone. This technology is known to the anthropologists as the "paleolithic" (note another display ritual). The remains of stone tools are considered to be the first irrefutable evidence of human culture. And stone artifacts appear abundantly at archaeological sites. Evidence of the bone, tooth, and hair culture, on the other hand, was

perishable; it could have no more permanence than an intelligently conceived series on broadcast television.

But humanity nonetheless preserves a "racial memory" of that momentous event when the undisciplined and overwrought blue stars in this quadrant touched its collective psyche. And having been inspired by the stars, they realized the power that the heavens *could* have over their lives.

They've been waiting for the stars to reassert themselves in human affairs ever since. Some haven't waited. They have conceived a special discipline, called "astrology," for the study of the stars' influence. Modern human society supports more professional astrologers than ethicists. Almost all human beings follow the work of astrologers closely. As well they might. Excepting fortune cookies (which are highly underrated, even by the human beings who manufacture them), there are few sources of personal advice that are nearly as good.

It is a uniquely human impulse to take a fundamental truth, such as the power of the stars, and generalize it into an industry such as astrology. Human beings have done the same with parapsychology, ufology, phenomenology, and spiritualism. Their mistake, of course, is in believing that the stars would *want* to influence their affairs. But the faith of these creatures in their own importance is all but unbounded.

One has but to spend a morning in a church or an afternoon at a New Age bookstore to appreci-

ate the human beings' drive to believe themselves important. That is what I was doing when a kindly stranger approached me and asked if I would like to attend a spectral tutelage from Alpha Centauri. How could I refuse?

The fee was modest, as these things go. I paid far more to have my aura mapped the month before. And it certainly couldn't touch what I paid for my tarot reading.

I was led to the apartment of a channel, that is, the person who is in touch with beings from Alpha Centauri. Having recently retired from the profession of selling life insurance, he was a gentle and softspoken person who greeted me warmly, avoiding any mention of my unusual appearance or smell.

We began with a short prayer to the light of the spirit, and the channel then lapsed into a sort of reverie. With his eyes half closed, he began to speak in tones I can only describe as John Gielgud imitating Rodney Dangerfield.

"Greetings from the light of heaven," he said. "Do you desire advice?"

"To whom am I speaking?" I asked.

"I lack a name as you would know it," said the spirit from Alpha Centauri.

"What shall I call you?" I asked.

"Call me not," it said. "Just

(Continued to page 30)



## FROM THE BOOKSHELF

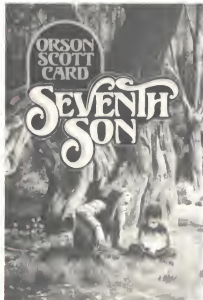
By Janice M. Eisen

# Cracking the Spine

### *Seventh Son*

By Orson Scott Card  
Tor, 1987  
241 pp., \$17.95

Many fantasy novels are based on the lore and legends of past cultures. Celtic and Norse folklore, in particular, have been



overused to the point of boredom. Orson Scott Card has done something I would not have thought possible: he's found an unexhausted mythos.

*Seventh Son* is based on American frontier magic and folklore, traditions unknown to most modern Americans. It takes place during the settlement of the West in an alternate history where the Revolutionary War

never took place.

This novel begins the story of Alvin, the seventh son of a seventh son, who has extraordinarily powerful magic abilities, referred to as "knacks." He spends most of the book narrowly escaping death, a death desired by what must surely be a unique villain—water.

Religion plays an important role; unlike many SF authors who are uncomfortable with religion, Card can depict it as central to characters' lives, honestly and without condescension, although he couldn't resist the temptation to engage in a little Protestant-bashing.

Alvin's story is interesting and compelling right up to the end, when the reader is left hanging.

Be warned: *Seventh Son* is the first of five books about Alvin, and Card has provided no ending, no resolution at all. This seems to be happening more and more in SF and fantasy series, and I think it cheats the reader.

Another problem with the book is that the first five chapters, which appeared in *Isaac Asimov's* as the story "Hatrack River," do not focus on Alvin, and the featured character is not seen again until nearly the end of the novel.

She will apparently be important later in the series, but it's very disconcerting to have an important character disappear. I'm also dubious about some of the details of Card's alternate history.

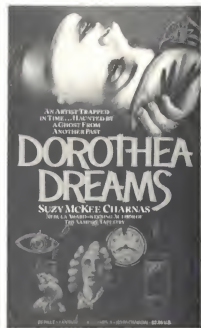
On the whole, though, I'd recommend *Seventh Son*, as long as you don't mind a cliffhanger ending.

Rating: ☆☆☆ ½

### *Dorothea Dreams*

By Suzy McKee Charnas  
Berkley, 1987  
246 pp., \$2.95

Once in a great while you run across a book that is so good that you want to push it in front of people's faces and force them to



read it. *Dorothea Dreams* is such a book. It's a superb fantasy novel about art, death, and courage.

If you require knights and wizards in your fantasy, this book is not for you. The fantasy element, while central, is small enough that the novel could have been (should have been) marketed as mainstream. If you're looking for characters who live and breathe and love, you'll be enthralled.

There are two intertwining plotlines, one concerning an aging artist with strange nightmares and her old friend

### RATING SYSTEM

☆☆☆☆☆  
☆☆☆☆  
☆☆☆  
☆☆  
☆

Outstanding  
Very good  
Good  
Fair  
Poor

who is dying of cancer, the other about poor Hispanic teenagers fighting to save their neighborhood.

Charnas is as compelling and persuasive when dealing with the *barrio* kids as she is when writing about the artist and her friend. The two stories converge throughout the book and then mesh beautifully.

*Dorothea Dreams* is one of the best novels I've ever read. Go find it.

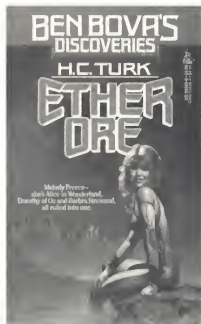
Rating: ☆☆☆☆

#### Time Pressure

By Spider Robinson

Ace, 1987

216 pp., \$16.95



Spider Robinson is one of Robert A. Heinlein's greatest and least critical admirers, and his writing is coming more and more to resemble Heinlein's. *Time Pressure* features rugged, independent characters, women with beautiful breasts, some fairly graphic sex, and long lectures on various subjects.

Unfortunately, Robinson has the style down, but he simply doesn't have Heinlein's genius. The story, which should have been fascinating, is often tedious instead.

Set in 1973, the book is narrated by Sam Meade, a resident of Nova Scotia's North Mountain, who discovers a time traveler.

(We eventually find out that it is a sequel to Robinson's novel *Mind-killer*, although, due to time travel, it takes place earlier in "real" time.) The rest of the book shows us the adventures, sexual and otherwise, of Sam, the time traveler, and Sam's hippie friends.

What there is of a plot is incoherent, and near the end of the book there is a 13-page lecture that explains what should have been the plot. The narrator apologizes for the lecture in advance, but it's still a bad idea, and bad writing. The ending itself is a real anticlimax.

Bad writing abounds in this novel, which might be referred to as "cyberhippie." Every place and person encountered, no matter how briefly, is described in excruciating detail, almost none of which is important. Details give a story texture, but this is overkill.

Robinson has also filled the book with in-group references: mentions of well-known SF authors and stories, the (unnecessary) use of the word "fiction" as coined by Heinlein, a character named Snaker whose name has an origin almost identical to Spider's, and a long passage about how wonderful SF readers are.

This kind of pandering is boring and a real turn-off. He has even gotten facts about the history of personal computers wrong; there's no excuse for anachronisms in a story set in 1973.

Spider Robinson used to be a pretty good writer. I wish he wouldn't bury his talent under a dreadful Heinlein pastiche.

Rating: ☆

#### Dover Beach

By Richard Bowker

Bantam/Spectra, 1987

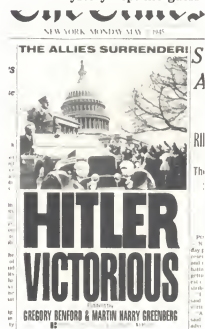
272 pp., \$3.95

Like many SF fans, I also enjoy mysteries, and I'm particularly delighted when a novel combines both interests. *Dover Beach* is a hard science fiction, medium-boiled detective story that succeeds in both fields

The novel takes place some years after a limited nuclear exchange, followed in the U.S. by the Frenzy, when many institutions, especially libraries and universities, were destroyed. As the story opens, a semblance of order is being restored, but it will be a long time before civilization truly returns.

The main character, Walter Sands, has just gone into business as a detective, self-consciously patterning himself on old fictional private eyes. His first case leads him into a tangle of academic competition, international conflict, controversial research on cloning human beings, and the requisite damsel in distress.

The mystery kept me guess-



ing right up to the end; the science fiction, with its detailed portrayal of the remnants of the U.S., is equally good. The plot works well, and somehow all the pieces fit together. I highly recommend *Dover Beach*.

Rating: ☆☆☆

#### Ether Ore

By H.C. Turk

Tor, 1987

282 pp., \$3.50

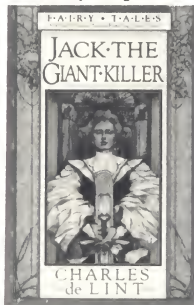
Until picking up this book, I had never seen a novel whose entire justification for existence was puns and wordplay. Even Piers Anthony treats puns as



condiments, not as the meal itself.

From the title onward, *Ether Ore* is one pun after another. The most important political figure is Adele Hitler of Doitchland, a great peacemaker whose adversaries include Wynton Churchill and Lynda Buns Jonestown. The main character watches an Eastern movie which features horseboys wearing greenjeans. You get the idea. The joke of slightly changed words and phrases gets old very quickly. That and the weird writing style detract from the story, such as it is.

If you can put up with the puns, the book is kind of fun. I reached the limit of my tolerance about halfway through the book,



so I never did find out how the adventures of Melody Preece on Marz, the Tan Planet, turned out. I recommend it only to those who really like wordplay.

Rating: ☆☆

#### *Hitler Victorious*

Edited by Gregory Benford  
and Martin Harry Greenberg  
Berkley, 1987  
323 pp., \$3.95

Alternate histories have long been popular with SF writers and readers, and one of the most common triggers for those stories is a change in the outcome of World War II.

As Norman Spinrad's perceptive, thought-provoking

introduction to this anthology points out, this popularity springs from both our fascination with Hitler and our uncomfortable knowledge that World War II was an awfully close call.

Benford and Greenberg have collected eleven stories, some reprints and some original, about a German victory in World War II. The results range from an America split between the Nazis and the Japanese to a strategic situation similar to today's world, in which the U.S. and Germany seek detente and accommodation. Unfortunately, the anthology suffers from the inclusion of too many mediocre stories, which tend to obscure the good ones.

Notable selections include C.M. Kornbluth's "Two Dooms," in which the U.S. fails to develop the atomic bomb, resulting in an American invasion of Japan, which leads to an Axis victory; David Brin's "Thor Meets Captain America," a delightfully strange story in which the old Norse gods enter the war; and Keith Roberts's "Weihnachtsabend" (Christmas Eve), which includes wonderful details of life under the Two Empires and, unlike most of the other stories, does not have a happy ending.

Less successful are Sheila Finch's "Reichs-Peace," an unconvincing story of a reformed, peaceable Nazi government; Howard Goldsmith's "Do Ye Hear the Children Weeping?" which works as horror but then provides a "rational" explanation which doesn't work; and the biggest disappointment, Gregory Benford's "Valhalla," which is very well-written but has an ending I saw coming by the third page of the story.

Overall, the stories require too much exposition to explain the different alternate universes. You can get away with an expository lump in one story, but not over and over. Also, some of the stories are repetitious. I'd recommend this book to those who have a particular interest in alternate history or World War II.

Rating: ☆☆☆

*Jack, the Giant-Killer*  
By Charles de Lint

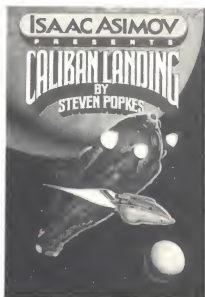
January/February 1988

Ace, 1987  
202 pp., \$16.95

This novel is the second in Ace's series of adult fantasy novels based on fairy tales. I can only hope that the rest will be as enjoyable as this one, and as beautifully produced.

De Lint's version of this familiar story will be quite unfamiliar to most readers, since he has thrown in elements from a number of fairy tales as well as a great deal of Celtic folklore and then set the whole thing in contemporary Ottawa.

I don't usually like this sort of fantasy, but de Lint succeeded in making it fresh. The story of Jacky Rowan and her friend Kate Hazel plays on our wish for



adventure, telling us that it's right here if we could only see it.

The novel's characters are archetypes, but they somehow manage to be people as well. The descriptions of the evil Unseelie Court are brilliantly nightmarish; this is definitely not a book for children. Read *Jack, the Giant-Killer* and be enchanted.

Rating: ☆☆☆

*Caliban Landing*  
By Steven Popkes  
Congdon & Weed, 1987  
281 pp., \$16.95

This first novel presents an engaging story of an alien race's first contact with humans. A

survey ship comes to Caliban, believing it contains no intelligent life, and a crew member accidentally runs over and kills one of the aliens. The humans spend the rest of the novel trying to communicate with the Calibii and to receive absolution for that death.

The Calibii, who see and communicate by radio waves emitted by Caliban's plant life, would be interesting aliens, but they are not alien enough. I never got the feeling that I was experiencing a non-human psychology; the Calibii seem more like a primitive human tribe. Their culture is interesting, but not unusual enough given their many physical differences from humans.



Each of the main human characters has a deep, dark secret which is making him or her somewhat crazy. The reader learns about these secrets in individual flashbacks, and these four chapters are the best part of the novel.

The characters, however, are almost unbearably self-conscious. They are constantly analyzing themselves — Who am I? What am I? What is she? What do I want? How do I feel? Why am I here? — *ad nauseum*. Their constant internal dialogues tended to make me almost as crazy as they were.

A smaller, but nagging, problem is that the story is sup-

PAGE 22

posedly being written by one of the Calibii, but it includes material she couldn't possibly know about. Popkes's writing is smooth, with occasional lapses, and his flashback chapters are engrossing. He is a promising author, and this is a pretty good first novel.

Rating: ☆ ☆ ½

### Strange Toys

By Patricia Geary  
Bantam/Spectra, 1987  
256 pp., \$3.50

*Strange Toys* is a strange book. It is an odd, compelling, really different fantasy, though at times impenetrable. You'll have to pay close attention to follow the story, but it's worth it.

The three parts of this novel show the protagonist, Pet, at ages nine, sixteen, and somewhere in her thirties.

The longest and best section is the first, which takes place in 1960. Pet's oldest sister, Deane, is a practitioner of dark magics, and Pet's curiosity gets her involved as well. When Deane is arrested for unstated crimes, Pet, her parents, and her other sister June flee across the country to avoid Deane's accomplices. They take with them June and Pet's 37 stuffed poodles, whose odd toys somehow become central to the story. Then things get weird.

The characterization is excellent, particularly the portrayals of Pet and June. Geary's descriptions are vivid and eerie; the most chilling sequence in the story takes place in Disneyland, the epitome of all that is bright and normal.

The ending of the novel is confusing and a bit of a let-down. Despite that problem, I recommend the book for a dark winter night.

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ½

### The Dark Lady: A Romance of the Far Future

By Mike Resnick  
Tor, 1987  
279 pp., \$3.50

Don't let the subtitle of this book fool you: while it is indeed a January/February 1988

romance set in the far future, it is closer to fantasy than to SF. Apart from the presence of aliens, this "far future" is very like the present.

The trappings, though, are not important to this moving and unusual quest story, in which an alien called Leonardo seeks a mysterious woman who has appeared in works of art for 8,000 years.

Leonardo confronts a hostile galaxy, dominated by humans who detest him and all other aliens, and he cannot reconcile his Bjornn moral code with the actions he must take to survive. In addition to the Dark Lady, he seeks meaning and direction to his life, as in most quest stories,



and the reader can sympathize with his intellectual and emotional turmoil.

Resnick's characters are well-drawn and interesting, and their adventures on various planets make for a damned good read. The novel's ending, unfortunately, is disappointing, so the book as a whole left me unsatisfied.

If you're looking for great art, you won't find it here, but *The Dark Lady* is an enjoyable way to spend an evening.

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆

(Publishers please note: Books for review in this column should be sent to: Janice Eisen, Barney

Square, 225 State St., Apt. 454, Schenectady, NY 12305. A duplicate copy, or a copy of the cover, should be sent to Aboriginal Science Fiction, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01801

back from Mars. This book should fill you in on some of what American culture's been through while you were gone.

Rating: ☆☆☆

—ABO—

—ABO—

## Books

(Continued from page 17)

recent work "The Idea is that if World War III broke out, civilization ended, and this alone of Ellison's numerous publications survived. It would be enough to preserve his reputation. Think of it as Harlan Ellison's First Fio.

Of course many of the stories and essays appear in other Ellison collections ("I Have No Mouth ...," "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes," "The Deathbird," etc.), but here the texts are purged of whatever corruptions they may have accrued, and there are some rare, even unpublished items, including a full-length screenplay.

There are, alas, no long introductions by Harlan. I miss them. I suspect a lot of people do.

If I have to say this is recommended, well ... welcome

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# Boneflower

## By Ray Aldridge

### Art by Cortney Skinner

Jolo Barram's battered prospecting vessel sat cooling at the edge of the deserted colony. Aboard were Jolo, his young wife, Sinda, and the body of their only child, Talm, poisoned by a synthesizer malfunction.

Sinda was silent, exhausted by her grief. Her long black hair hung in tangles about her white face.

He remembered her last words. "The ship," she had said. "This stinking shambling ancient idiot of a ship. How could it have been so *stupid*?" Her meaning had been plain — *your ship, old man.*

Yes, he thought, *the ship is old and the ship is stupid. Like me.*

\*\*\*\*\*

The empty huts huddled close to the silver seedship that had brought the colonists here, so long ago. The dead colony was another entry in Jolo Barram's long list of failures — only living colonies brought the finder's bounty from SeedCorp. But Barram descended from his ship, as much to escape Sinda's anger as to satisfy his curiosity.

He wandered through the village. The huts seemed orderly, the scraps of existence neatly arranged. The only remains he found were of animals — a mummified dog in one locked hut, goat bones in the high-walled pens.

At the foot of the hill, where a few dusty-purple trees spread grotesque branches, he found the little cemetery. The dry soil grew no flowers, but colored pebbles decorated the graves, spelled out pathetic epitaphs. "Marlis Twohsa, beloved husband of Lefasha and Dialle, B. 2, D. 25," he read. And, "Here lies Yolea Dawn Serpinna, taken to the angels too soon."

He counted a meager two dozen burials. Where were the others? The mystery distracted him from his grief.

\*\*\*\*\*

The seedship opened to Barram without difficulties. Inside, the red glow of emergency lamps lit stasis racks still crowded with viable embryo flasks.

Barram checked the ship's wombs. Green telltales twinkled on all but one; there Barram found the last motherdroid.

When he swung back the endplate, a gagging stench billowed forth. A mechanical voice spoke from the damp darkness.

"Danger," it said. "Danger. Danger."

"What danger?" Barram asked.

The droid craned its rust-spotted head up at him. Its photoreceptors were filmed with a brown slime. "Hiding. Yes, that is correct." It tried to withdraw down the throat of the womb.

"What are you hiding from?"

The droid surged up, and a reeking wave of disintegrated womb lining slopped out. "Happiness. Serenity. Contentment," it said. It ducked down again and its body shook in a brief spasm.

Energy arced, a stink of burning rose from the womb, and the droid's abused mechanism failed for the last time.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the morning, he swung the crawler out of the hold. As he loaded the last of his gear, he looked up to see Sinda, watching from the lock, blank-faced.

Finally he raised his hand in tentative farewell.

\*\*\*\*\*

Beyond the last dead field, the track rose into the badlands. This was an arid world, where scars lasted long. He had no trouble following the old ruts.

Presently he moved between the crumbling banks of a narrow canyon. In the growing heat the shade was welcome.

He became drowsy. The fragile powdery scents of the desert filled his nostrils, and the miles drifted behind him. He almost missed the place where the track climbed an ancient breakdown.

Barram wrenched the controls and the crawler churned up the soft slope and over the top in a choking spray of dust. When he rubbed the dust from his eyes, he saw the Goner artifact below, like the rib cage of some vast, precise beast, half-sunk in a faceted tarpit.

The terrace was a heptangle a hundred meters across, supported three meters above the sand by a pedestal. In the center of the terrace a dozen richly carved arches rose to a height of ten meters, connected by a backbone of lintel stones.

Under the arches, something bright glistened.

He parked. After the ear-filling grind of the treads, the silence pressed against him.

He began to walk the perimeter. Within fifty meters he came upon the disintegrating remnants of two carts. The bones of oxen lay where they'd been left tied to a stake.

A hundred paces farther was a cleft in the terrace, glowing with a pale upward-flowing rainbow. Barram





squatted, tossed pebbles into the streaming color. They fell to the ground and were kicked away gently by a repeller field. He looked closer at some of the bits that lay there.

Here was a shattered crystal eye, here the remains of a steel finger, and there a shard of circuit flake. He sorted through the remains until he was satisfied that the missing motherdroids were here, pounded to fine scrap.

When he eventually stepped into the field, invisible fingers plucked him up and served him out onto the surface of the terrace.

He waited, his shoulders hunched together. The strum of the repeller field shivered through the soles of his boots, as it went about its business of pushing dust off the edge of the artifact. A hot breeze puffed into the cirque, playing over the arches, drawing a soft, complex moan from the carvings. His shoulder-ram scanned back and forth, brushing his ear, and he jumped.

As he approached, the carvings caught his eye. The almost-human faces were contorted with grief, the almost-human bodies were twisted in lamentation.

Under the arches was a deep rectangular pool, filled with glittering fluid. A sharp, sweet smell rose from the fluid, bitter almonds and decay, and Barram was careful to stay away from the edge.

Halfway down the length of the pool, Barram looked up. The carvings were changing. Teeth bared in horror were now obscured by softening lips; eyes once wide in grief were half-closed in descending pain. With each arch, the carvings shifted, approaching serenity.

He reached the last arch, looked down, and saw the bones, blue in the depths of the pool. Human bones, from the fragile bones of infants to the long bones of mature humans, all together at the bottom.

The colonists.

Barram backed away. He lost his balance and fell hard. The breath left him and everything else receded as he struggled for air. In that instant of helplessness, he was horribly conscious of his own brittle old bones.

\*\*\*\*\*

Barram came down out of the badlands at dusk.

In the morning, after a night's rest, they would lift away from this dead world, two rich seedseekers. Like every other known Goner artifact, this one would prove to be inexplicable, indestructible, priceless. The Goners, a humanoid spacefaring race, had been so long extinct that only a few dozen obdurate monuments survived in all the Human Cluster, and these would (so the scholars speculated) last until the end of the universe. Certainly no human technology had ever affected or injured a Goner artifact, or interfered with its mysterious function. Each artifact was unique, united only in its adamant resistance to rational analysis. Barram would sell this one's coordinates to the highest bidder, and the bids would be very high indeed.

Barram could imagine other children, and a home where they might grow up in safety. Barram was aging — he rebelled at the word old — but there was a century or two left to him. And Sinda was young.

He found her by the medmech, keeping vigil over the boy's body.

"Sinda," he said, full of bittersweet triumph. "Sinda, I found a Goner site."

Her eyes widened. "What's it like?"

He described the artifact.

"And the colonists?" she finally asked.

"Dead, all dead. Though I don't know the mechanism. We'll leave that to the experts."

"I want to see it before we leave. I should take something away from here, don't you think?"

He watched her for a long moment, saddened by her tone. Would it be safe? Goner artifacts sometimes were dangerous, but only in an indifferent, entirely accidental way. And she did deserve to take something away. "Yes, of course you can see it."

\*\*\*\*\*

The crawler thumped over the rim of the cirque and he killed the engine.

"Are you impressed?" he asked, before he turned to her.

When they stood on the glistening terrace, he set down the robocam he had brought. Barram led her toward the first arches, and the robocam followed, tracks clattering.

"Don't look at the arches," he warned, so of course she did. When she looked away her face was pale.

To distract her, he pointed at the pool. "What is it, the fluid?"

She pulled a sample tube from her equipment belt. "Careful," he called, just as the coping tilted behind her and slid her onto the glittering surface.

As Barram rushed forward, the coping dropped back into place and a rainbow field splashed up from the pool's edges, curving under the arches. Barram smashed into the field. He rebounded, staggered.

The field flashed across the top of the pool, and passed under Sinda. Sinda floated slowly toward the far end of the pool, eyes closed, face tranquil.

Barram stumbled after, pressing against the field, watching Sinda spin, her arms and legs outstretched, a graceful eddy.

The bones, he thought. "Swim! Get back! Please, please."

He ran around the last arch, but the field rejected him there as well. He slowly collapsed, sliding down against the field as Sinda neared the edge.

A moment before she touched the coping, he shut his eyes tight. The field cut off, and Barram pitched forward.

His eyes jarred open.

He expected some unbearable sight. Instead, Sinda floated at the edge, unharmed, a small delighted smile curving her mouth.

Barram reached out, caught her arm, pulled her through a notch in the coping.

"Are you all right? Are you hurt?" He shook her, almost roughly.

She sat up, and put her hand gently to his face. "I'm fine."

He pulled her to him, squeezing her until she made a small sound of distress.

"You're really not hurt?"

"Better." She touched her chest, over her heart.

Barram felt a chill. "Wait," he said. "Look at this."

Cautiously, he approached the edge of the pool then beckoned Sinda closer. The bones glimmered in the blue of the pool.

Sinda looked where he pointed. Her face remained serene. "There's a certain symmetry. Don't you think?" Her voice was calm, measured.

Looking down, he could see what she meant. The bones lay in a radial heap, like a skeletal anemone. The reflection in the polished black side completed the flower in dim reprise.

Barram shook his head. He could see what had formed the pattern; the people must have been trying to get out through the notch at the moment of death.

"Come," he said. "It's time to get back."

\*\*\*\*\*

In his anxiety to be away he forgot to bring the robocam.

That evening, Sinda was herself, sweet and clever. They sat together in the upper observation blister and watched the huge orange sun set over the badlands.

She exclaimed in pleasure over a cluster of tiny moons, like crescent jewels in the bloody light of the sunset.

"What happened in the pool, Sinda? Can you tell me now?"

A tiny quirk of pain passed over her face. "It made me happy. There's something wrong, isn't there, Jolo? I've stopped grieving, and I thought I never would."

\*\*\*\*\*

In the morning, Barram woke alone.

The first thing he noticed when he stepped from the ladder was the missing crawler.

Barram cursed. The ship carried only one vehicle. On foot, it would take days to reach the shrine. He had two choices; he could wait and hope she would return, or he could raise the ship and try to jockey it over to the shrine. The latter choice was dangerous, the former hopeless.

Presently he began to secure the ship for lift. Then he buried Talm in the dusty graveyard, but there was no time for an epitaph.

\*\*\*\*\*

Barram set down near the crumbling rim of the cirque — not the safest groundpoint, but the nearest. He was not sure how long the soft concretion would bear the great weight of the ship, but he did not plan to be long. He scrambled from the ship and bounded down the slope of the cirque, slipping in the loose scree.

She lay there on the shining black, face down. He turned her over.

He saw nothing fearful; she had suffered no monstrous sea-change. Her skin had a slightly coarser texture. Tiny lines webbed her eyes, and the flesh had fallen away from its former taut beauty.

He gathered her up, and took her away from the pool. The loose stone of the slope made her hard to

carry, but he persevered. Back in the ship, he laid her on their bunk. Her eyes fluttered, but she slept on, breathing evenly.

He sat beside her, wondering. Then he remembered the little robocam he'd left on the site.

He found it still crawling doggedly over the shrine. He pulled the matrix.

When he returned to the ship, the lock was shut, though Barram was positive he'd left it open. When he put his palm against the lockplate, nothing happened. He became frightened, and pounded his fist on the unyielding monolith of the hull. "Sinda!" His voice cracked. "Sinda! Let me in."

For a long moment he wondered just what sort of creature he had brought up from the shrine. But then her image formed on the intervid. It was Sinda, though her eyes were too bright, her mouth marred by a fawning smile. "Jolo, I can't let you in."

He heard a disturbing slyness in her voice. "I don't understand."

"Yes, you do. You'd keep me from the pool." Her eyes softened. "Jolo, I can't tell you how it is, really. The pool washes away grief, washes away every trace. I don't just mean Talm; I mean *everything*. Everything that ever hurt you, gone. Every regret, every sadness. Gone."

She bit her lip. "That's why you can't keep me from the pool. Once you've been there, you can't bear the return of even the smallest hurt."

He feared her conviction. "Sinda," he said, as calmly as he could, "I'd never stop you from doing what you must. You can trust me."

For a long moment she stared at him, flat-eyed; then he saw that her need to get outside would force her to believe him. "I trust you, Jolo."

The lock released with a shuddering pneumatic sigh.

She was waiting for him in their cabin. She was calm, until she saw the expression on his face. "Oh, no. You promised."

"I won't break it," he lied. "But at least wait and see if there's anything we can do about ... about the side effects."

"Of course, that's sensible." Her eyes darkened. "It ... the peace ... it doesn't seem to last very long."

"Come," he said, and led her down, to the medmech, which confirmed the evidence of his eyes.

He wondered how many times Sinda had floated the pool, how many years each trip had cost her.

He pondered the medmech's results at such length that she became restive in the narrow coffin. She began to thump her fists against the plug, and he hurried to release her before she injured herself.

She was pale, shaking. "I must go," she said, trying to push past him.

When she realized he didn't plan to let her pass, she fought him. But old as he was, he was still the stronger. She begged, she cursed, she wept, but he took her to their sleepcabin, and instructed the ship to keep her there.

For a while, he watched her on the sensor pit's in-

(Continued to page 62)

# Star Cops: Frog or Prince?

By Susan Ellison

Once upon a time, in a far-away kingdom of great magic and even greater science, there lived a race of beings called Americans, who were suckers not only for a British accent (no matter how unintelligible), but who oohed and aahed over almost every British television export of the science fiction sort.

First there was the classic television series *Doctor Who* — currently secure in his seventh regeneration with Sylvester McCoy playing the Doctor. And the Americans looked upon these many-faced Doctors, and found them good. (Which was especially good since the BBC had decided to program *Who* opposite the long-running soap opera *Coronation Street* which, in terms of American tv, was as life-sustaining an act as programming something opposite *The Cosby Show*.)

Then the Brits, exporting one of the few products of value their waning Empire had to offer, sent the Americans *Blake's Seven*; and the Americans looked upon this intergalactic anti-hero epic...and they found it good, ever so good.

Many years and many exported series passed; secure in their belief that most Americans for tv is so wretched that the benumbed Yanks would be swayed by anything even semi-coherent, the BBC put forth a new series called *Star Cops*. But when it arrives here, will Americans look upon it and find it good?

*Star Cops*, a nine-part science fiction/detective series created by Chris Boucher and written by Boucher, Philip Martin and John



A lady Star Cop

Collee, premieres on BBC2 on July 6th.

The action is set in the year 2027: humanity has gone into space. We have a base on the moon, a colony on Mars, and five manned space stations orbiting the Earth. And where man goes, history tells us, the law follows — this time in the shape of the International Space Police Force. *Star Cops*.

The protagonist is Nathan Spring, reluctant head of the ISPF, who has been given a Dirty Dozen of part-time "star cops" (a nickname given to them by a journalist due to their complete inefficiency; as with all nicknames, it sticks) whom he must beat into serviceable shape. It's the "Wild Bunch" paradigm.

Forty years from now, life hasn't suddenly become a utopian paradise: the *Star Cops* still have

to contend with murder, hijacking, sabotage, and theft. (I must admit to feeling a trifle dismayed that by 2027, though we've managed to lick the problem of commercial spaceflight, we're still indulging our penchant for mayhem, this time interplanetary.) Now, multiply the complexity of the crime a hundredfold: imagine what weightlessness does to a murder victim, or the logistics of responding to a crime perpetrated on Mars or the moon. These are the problems that face Nathan Spring and crew.

Chris Boucher (who wrote three of the Tom Baker *Doctor Who* stories: *Face Of Evil*, *The Robots Of Death* and *Image Of The Fendahl*) has a definite view of the 21st Century that he brings to this series. He explains (as reported in the U.K. by the *Radio*

*Times*) that he wants "to get away from the gee-whiz elements of space opera, and back to nuts and bolts, with an intelligent detective series set in an alien environment. I certainly didn't want 'to boldly leap' where lots of people have leapt before."

Further emphasizing his concern with "gritty realism," Boucher waxes extrapolative about how the inhabitants of that future Earth have changed. "People look much the same, because the traditional dress styles haven't changed dramatically in the past forty years; so we can safely assume they won't change too much in the next forty." (It would be disingenuous to suggest, I suppose, that television *usually* presents the future world as "not much changed," not out of any substantial cultural or sociological extrapolation, but because it's cheaper to have cars, buildings and clothing look as they do today. Which is one of the reasons we look with such delight on *Bladerunner*.)

"On the other hand," Boucher continues, "it's a world where you don't go out at night, if you're sensible. The parks are hunting grounds for what we've called Urban Apaches, a bit like the kind of punk tribes you already find in New York's Central Park."

Dave Calder, who portrays the detective, has specific ideas about the character of Nathan Spring. "He's a troubled man, virtually unable to handle any sort of deep personal relationship, but a good detective. He's also immensely distrustful of the computerized world he lives in, convinced that it encourages people not to think for themselves."

Other principal members of the *Star Cops* team include David Theroux (played by Erick Ray Evans, who has appeared in both *Superman I* and *II*), an American flight engineer, whose character is a complete contrast to the introverted Spring; and Pal Keny, an Australian, played by Linda Newton, who soon joins the ranks of the ISPF.



Suited up for duty in *Star Cops*

To give the show a genuine feel of what it would be like to live and work in space, the BBC went to NASA for advice. (Exactly *who* at NASA we are not told. Sociologists, project engineers, astrophysicists, metallurgists, the guard at the gate? We are not told.)

Evgeny Gridneff, the producer, comments, "We didn't want to make *Blake's Seven* or *Star Trek*. Instead, we've created an exciting, unusual, futuristic environment; but it's as authentic as we can make it. So the drama comes not from the realms of the fantastic, but from the strength of the plot and the realism of the characters. What we didn't want was a series crammed with special effects that would overshadow the characters. People are the main ingredient, and the technology should always be just the icing on the cake."

The theme music for the show (released on BBC singles, numbers RESL 208 and 12RSL 208) is by Justin Hayward of the Moody Blues, who had a huge hit in the British pop charts with "Forever Autumn" from the album *Jeff Wayne's Musical Version Of "The War Of The Worlds."* Unfortunately, Hayward is no Miklos Rozsa, Ennio Morricone or Bernard Herrmann, and the theme is, at best,

serviceable. Those who have allowed it to run through their ears have called it "dreary and forgettable." But then, they said that about Beethoven's *Ninth*, so who's to judge?

While on a visit to England, J. Michael Straczynski, the current story editor for the new syndicated *Twilight Zone* series, saw *Star Cops*. He comments that, "It's as interesting as a mouthful of sawdust, the acting is flat and rather poor. If you have insomnia, it's great." On the other hand, Bill Warren, noted film critic, has seen five minutes of the show and says that *Star Cops* "has very distinctly a *Blade Runner* feel, but it has more humor to it, more than you would suspect. It looks very attractive."

Thus, judgment overall will have to wait. In terms of American enthusiasm for this new entry in the tv/sf sweepstakes, the BBC and the show's producers have their fingers crossed. (As a British subject, I find myself waving the Union Jack in aid of *Star Cops* finding an audience here. But the pragmatist in me remains cautious.)

When the series flickers to life on the Sonys and Zeniths in American households, those who yearn for good sf on television may well give the kiss of approval to *Star Cops*. The question remains: If the kiss is planted, will





What have we here?

the viewer get to share Twinkies with a Prince...or end up with a face covered by warts?

## Star Cops: Episode Guide First Season

1) An Instinct for Murder: written by Chris Boucher. Detective Chief Superintendent Nathan Spring assumes command of the ISPF and starts out by investigating the mysterious failures of the backpacks in spacesuits.

2) Conversations with the Dead: written by Chris Boucher. On the way to the Martian Colony the engines on the freight ship *Daedalus* are fired prematurely. The crew survives, but it will take years to reach them! While Spring is trying to solve the problem on the *Daedalus* he is called to Earth for a more tragic case.

3) Intelligent Listening for Beginners: written by Chris Boucher. Michael Chandri, who owns an outpost on the moon and works in intelligent listening systems and bugging devices, tells Spring and Theroux that one of the Earth-Moon shuttles is going to be hijacked.

4) Trivial Games and Paranoid Pursuits: written by Chris Boucher. Does Harvey Goodman exist? His sister tries to contact him at the American Space Station; but they have no record of him.

5) This Case to be Opened in a Million Years: written by Philip Martin. The Santoni-Italia shuttle carrying nuclear waste crashes on the moon. Spring must deal

with it while on leave.

6) In Warm Blood: written by John Collee. The crew of *Pluto 5* returns from an exploratory mission. They have been dead for more than a year!

7) A Double Life: written by John Collee. Chamsya Assadi is determined to track down the thief that stole three embryos who were to inherit her fortune.

8) Other People's Secrets: written by John Collee. A



Speeding to the scene of the crime

psychiatrist is sent to the Moon-base to study the effects of living in space, and a number of malfunctions plague the Moon-base crew.

9) Little Green Men And Other Martians: written by Chris Boucher. Something has been discovered on Mars and is on its way to the moon. The interest causes a death.

— ABO —

## Our Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 18)

ask what you will."

"Are you now on Alpha Centauri?"

"I have no location as you would know it, but to aid in your understanding I would say I am now located on the mass you call Alpha Centauri."

"Isn't it hot on your feet?" I asked.

"We create jokes about that which we do not understand," said the Centaurian. And coming from Rodney Dangerfield, it sounded serious indeed.

So I decided to behave with more sobriety. "Are you on A or B?" I asked.

"Eh?"

"Alpha Centauri is a binary," I said.

"Eh?"

"Are you on Alpha Centauri A or Alpha Centauri B? It makes a difference. One is red, the other is yellow."

"Eh?"

"Radiated color is a key to motivation," I said, reciting the first law of stellar ethology.

This seemed to help the Centaurian recover its bearings. "Of course," it said. "Do you wish guidance in the realm of higher realities?"

Now I felt like we were getting somewhere. I hadn't had a conversation about reality in over a year. "I want to ask about the intragalactic paroxysm," I said.

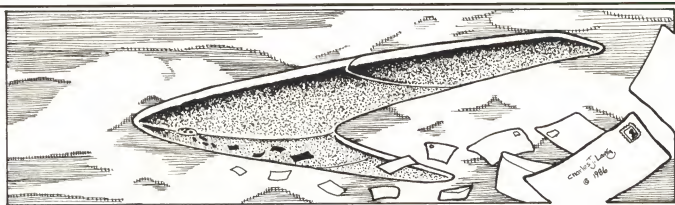
"Eh?"

"The intragalactic paroxysm," I said. "I want to know the deepest feelings of the stars that participated. The effects here have been profound."

But I am afraid I was boring the Centaurian, for at this point the channel's eyelids began to flutter, and he awoke, saying he had lost contact.

I was disappointed. I also wanted to ask if Alpha Centauri had changed since my last visit.

— ABO —



# Boomerangs

## Comments From Our Readers

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I just thought I'd write to tell you how great I think the magazine is. Your story selection through the first five issues has been superb and I hope it will continue to be so. I just wish someone would sell Aboriginal here. Fortunately, I do a lot of traveling and have been able to obtain the first five issues. I guess I ought to subscribe, shouldn't I? (Yes, — Ed.)

I read recently that the Alien Publisher lived in Memphis for a while. I wish I'd known at the time. I mean, that's only 70 miles from where I live and I would have loved to have met him. Oh well, maybe he'll show up at a convention sometime and I can meet him there. (Or it, since we don't know what sex, if any, it has. Nor do we know where it is, or where it is going to be, at any given moment. We always appear to learn after the fact. Sooner or later, we'll catch it, though. We're persistent. — Ed.)

I've got a friend who's been submitting stories to you, but he's never asked for your writer's guidelines — he's a bit obstinate at times — but I'm not, so if you happen to have an extra copy sitting around and gathering dust, stuff it in the enclosed SASE and who knows, maybe I'll try my hand at writing you a story.

That's all for now,  
Mary Doolittle  
State University, AR

Sirs,

It has been many years since I last subscribed to a science fiction magazine. Back in the golden days (the late 40's) I subscribed to *F&SF* and maintained the subscription until one year when I received a total of three issues for my year's payment. Since that time I have generally avoided the mags while focusing on hard covers (I have over two thousand titles).

And now, at last, comes a new magazine with the best of the traditional elements of science fiction magazine format: good short fiction, terrific art work, reviews, and gossip. Please, please keep up the good work. I sincerely hope that a sufficient number of supporters will subscribe to keep you in business for many years to come. You may rest assured that I will do my best to promote *ABO* among my friends, and will maintain my subscription as long as you can continue putting out the quality I have seen so far.

A question. Does anyone know what happened to Samuel R. Delany's sequel to *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*? It was supposed to be titled *The Sendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*. I would very much appreciate any information that can be provided. (The book is reportedly still forthcoming from Bantam, but as far as we know, the manuscript has not been turned in yet. — Ed.)

In any case, again my congratulations on your auspicious beginning. I look forward with pleasure to many years of good reading.

Sincerely,  
Richard E. Grant Ph.D.  
Spokane, WA

(Thanks for the kind words. If you ever miss an issue of *ABO* (unless you move and don't tell us), let us know. I suspect *F&SF* would have sent the copies if the magazine knew they weren't delivered. We are all at the mercy of the U.S. Postal Service. — Ed.)

Dear crazy alien,

Thanks a whole lot. I presently subscribe to the following SF magazines: *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *Amazing Stories*, *Fantasy and SF* and *The Twilight Zone*. I'm also a member of the Science Fiction Book Club.

You might think that with all these magazines etc., I get my monthly fix of SF + fantasy. Wrong!

I did a dumb thing a while back — I subscribed to another SF mag — *Aboriginal SF*. Now I find that my craving for SF is not satisfied until I have read my latest *Aboriginal* mag. (That's one kind of addiction we fully support — Ed.)

I wish to keep my habit alive so please accept my renewal for another 12 issues at \$20 (special self-renewal rate). My current

(Continued to page 52)

# Little Black Book / By

Tom Rolden was far from home and already late getting back.

"I've got to leave," he called. He'd tell Linda he was headed for Cheyenne, if she asked.

There was no response. The muted throbbing of Kraftwerk emanated from the living room. From the north came sounds of traffic along Colfax Avenue, and a gentle breeze past the balcony made the air seem fresh. Golden light bounced off windows in downtown Denver. A dozen stories below, a bus belched a blue smoke-cloud.

Was the man from last night staring up at him from the casual concealment of an automobile, or watching from beneath one of the large elms? Tom tried to tell himself he was imagining things. No one would be following him. He grimaced and went back inside.

The bathroom door finally opened. Linda Dorsey stood there, brushing her still-damp, ash-blond hair. Her country-girl-turned-city-woman smile made him wish he could stay. At twenty-four, his chronological junior by a year, she stood a few centimeters taller than Tom.

"It's that time?" Linda leaned against the wall, letting her robe fall open.

"Sorry." And he was. "I'll give you a call when I get back to town?" he asked. To Linda, he was a publisher's representative, selling books along the Rockies' front range.

"Sure."

In the hall, he watched the lighted floor numbers approach fourteen, idly wondering if Linda cared that she was actually on the thirteenth floor. Suddenly, he realized he was thinking about Marra. Why should she be intruding in his thoughts now?

The doors opened onto an empty elevator. Perfect. He was ready for his journey.

Before the doors closed behind him, Tom touched the simulated Rolex on his wrist. A push here and a press there and the watch face changed.

In place of gold dial and three analog hands was a gun-metal-blue digital display saying 07:25, THURSDAY, MAY 10, 1978. Below were three numbers. As Tom watched, the elevation decreased by two meters.

He tripped the final sequence. The background whine of motors and ventilation stopped. His stomach lurched sideways.

Tom blinked. Instead of riding in one of Otis Elevator's finest products, he stood on a dais in the corner of a brightly lit, white-walled apartment, the windows polarized for privacy. Home. Chicago.

An eye-level panel said 09:12 TUESDAY, JULY



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# John E. Stith / Art by Byron Taylor



Damn. Late for work again.

Tom knelt and hurriedly removed an equipment cover from the wall. Reaching inside the cramped compartment, he gently pulled a small module from the side of a gray panel. The field ebbed, and the activity recorder woke up. Perfect.

Late or not, he retrieved a nearby little black book. He frowned briefly and turned it right-side up, and searched until he found: LINDA DORSEY, DENVER, 1978. Below her address and phone number were:

DATE MET: MARCH 16, 1978.

CALL BACK: MAY 9, 1978.

BEST TIME TO CALL: 18:00.

COVER: BOOK COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE.

DATE FREQUENCY: 2-3 WEEKS.

Additional entries summarized her job, interests, hobbies, tastes, favorite colors, conversational topics, sexual preferences, taboos.

Tom changed the call-back date to May 22, 1978.

A nearby door opened onto a virtual costume shop in a walk-in closet. His 1970s shirt and pants fell into the discard pile. He selected brown checked trousers, black leather shoes, and a white shirt. A green scarf tucked into the standing collar. A black sack coat and beige felt bowler hat, devoid of labels, completed the 1880s outfit.

A quick check of the mechanism in the hat said his camera was loaded and charged. On a shelf, next to the rows of cort-aids for dialects, history, and customs, was a pair of flat-glass spectacles. He put them on carefully. A touch on the left temple switched on the link between glasses and camera. He watched the view. Fine.

He was prepared for another day in Washington, D.C., 1881. It wouldn't do to be carrying around a holo camera seven years before Eastman produced his box camera.

Tom paused to water a drooping trio of bonsai white cedars, then stepped onto the disk. He set coordinates to 09:00, June 28, 1881, and for a reserved room in a back-street hotel.

He felt the sideways lurch, and he jumped to Tuesday, just four days before President James Abram Garfield would be shot by Charles J. Guiteau, an unsuccessful and angered office seeker. Garfield would die in two months.

On the street outside was a blonde girl in a loose-fitting, knee-length dress and sailor hat. A wide ribbon sash circled her waist. She skipped past, pausing occasionally to kick a stone along. At her back, long ends of the bow fluttered.

Tom strolled in the opposite direction, surreptitiously taking pictures. The day was hot and muggy. He didn't look forward to seeing Garfield shot, but someone had to chronicle the events. Garfield's death marked a turning point. By dying, he helped eliminate the spoils system and aided passage of the Pendleton Act of 1883, marking the beginnings of the civil service.

Tom began taking photographs, preoccupied for

almost an hour before his mind wandered back to the encounter in the restaurant last evening in 1978.

All during dinner, a man at a corner table had alternated between staring at Tom and Linda and writing on a small pad. The man had looked vaguely familiar, but Tom couldn't remember seeing him before. Maybe he was a former lover of Linda's. But if so, why should he have seemed so familiar?

After another hour of unsuccessful efforts to keep his mind from wandering, he found himself thinking of Varla Temo. In fact, he was surprised at not having thought about her earlier. Three years earlier, in 2222, almost every woman he saw had reminded him of Varla.

A horse-drawn carriage churned up the dust as it passed him.

Varla. Varla, the score-keeper, who never gave up until she evened the score. How long had it taken him to understand that every time she appended "I guess" to a statement she was lying? Against Tom's will, an image of Varla, laughing at him during their last encounter, sprang into focus. They'd had several good times together, until that last night when he confronted her in a lie and she ridiculed him and told him how she had used him to meet the people she was actually interested in.

Not long after, Tom had begun to date women in the past.

Thoughts nagged him until local mid-afternoon.

In a concealed corner in a nearby alley he touched the return sequence. The display said 15:25, TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2225. Elapsed time in the past equaled elapsed time at home. Unfortunately.

He stepped off the disk. The holo packet from his bowler hat went into a comm slot. Without changing, Tom left his apartment and rode the elevator down twelve floors. The conference room there could have been an entertainment-holo studio lunchroom, with people dressed in a bewildering array of period costumes.

He finally located Marra across the room. Her long satiny black hair was confined in a bun for her assignment. She was looking intently at the front of the room, serious for the moment, but Tom knew that she laughed easily and often.

A young man leaned over to say something, to which her response was a polite smile and a brief shake of her head. Tom could all too easily understand the man's interest. Maybe he should see if she was busy tonight. They hadn't been out together for several days.

Tom reached the chair beside her and sat. "How was your day?" he asked quietly.

"Great. We even got to enjoy the weather. The rain stopped only an hour before we got there. I love that musty, earthy smell. I sometimes wish I had been born back then so I could wake up with the sunshine." Marra's assignment was in the early 1910s. As she smiled, her green eyes scanned his face.

He resisted the impulse to ask her out. It was tough enough to date women at just the right frequency, so they didn't lose interest or want too much commitment. Tomorrow would be soon enough. He



said, "You wouldn't really like the life of an early twentieth-century woman, would you?"

"You mean the part about no rights?"

He nodded. He rarely had to explain his thoughts to Marra.

"No. Not without an escape valve to bring me home when I'd had enough. But a few weeks might be nice."

At the front of the room, a woman signaled for attention. The briefing covered general updates before people split up into assignment session.

Back in his apartment, Tom showered quickly after removing his watch and overriding the tamper-destruct mechanism. He thumbed through his book and selected LILLIAN SORENSON, BOSTON, 1924. He picked a plaid, double-breasted suit and a striped tie from the closet.

A short reading of Lillian's entry brought back adequate recall, so Tom needed only a short refresher. He checked his remaining 1920s money supply, and carefully disconnected the recording module.

He made one last scan of the room. The bonsai white cedars looked no better than before.

Setting the controls, he hesitated, wondering why go to all this bother? Why not just relax and have a quiet evening here? The uncharacteristic feeling passed and he activated the controls.

In March 1924, an operator rang Lillian's number for him.

"Would you like to accompany me to dinner tonight, kiddo?" he asked. To Lillian, he was a Ford automobile salesman who occasionally traveled to Boston. It was always easier to be from somewhere else. Local questions made for too many traps.

"You caught me at a rather awkward time." Lillian's nasal New-England accent distorted over the phone. "I have at least six hours of grading school work tonight. I'm frightfully sorry."

Graciously, Tom agreed to call another time. Two weeks into Lillian's future, persistence paid off.

The sky was darkening into evening as a taxi delivered them to the restaurant.

"Have you changed barbers?" Lillian asked after she got comfortable. She smiled at him, her straight brown hair with bangs framing her face. Her black georgette frock with beads and sheer black stockings were a little more dressy than usual. Despite the frock, she looked prim. She looked quite at home in the public library, where Tom had met her. Tom was convinced she was so prim she didn't believe in even post-marital sex. But she was interesting to talk with.

"I'm — uh — not too sure it's to my liking. I shall probably change back." An involuntary touch had told him that he had, in his haste, put the part back in the middle of his dark-brown hair.

Later, appetites subdued, they discussed the Stalin-Trotsky power struggle initiated by Lenin's death. Tom was mildly frustrated, wondering how much it would hurt if he told her that Hitler was currently writing *Mein Kampf* from a jail cell, when he noticed a man eating dinner alone at a nearby table.

The lighting was poor, but the man looked very

much like the man who had been watching him in 1978. And he watched Tom and Lillian intently, dropping his gaze when Tom looked in his direction.

Tom's skin prickled. Suppose the authorities discovered his off-hours use of government transportation. True, the temporal field was a conservative one, requiring large changes in the past to bring about meaningful differences in the future, and the odds of Tom's own activities affecting anything significant were tiny. But tiny was not precisely zero.

Could this guy be building an evidence file? If he was, Tom didn't understand why he'd do it so blatantly.

Abruptly, the man finished his dinner and rose to leave.

Several minutes passed before Tom could again adequately hold up his end of the conversation. He and Lillian talked until nearly 11 p.m., but his attention never totally recovered. He said good night and, in a nearby alley, found a deep shadow to conceal his departure.

The local time was almost midnight before Tom finished jotting notes in his little black book. He worried about the man in 1924, but something else was bothering him. He felt lonely.

He considered a second date that night, but abandoned the idea. Tonight he needed the sleep.

Another 1881 passed and soon Tom sat in the briefing room again, next to Marra.

"Have a good day?" he asked.

"Except for a few minutes when Toni dropped her monitor earphone and some people nearby got real curious." The skin next to Marra's eyes crinkled as she explained how Toni had eventually convinced them the earphone was an elaborate earring that had broken.

"Are we still having dinner tonight?" he asked.

"Definitely."

They met at a restaurant across town. During the meal, Tom found it harder than ever to keep from looking at her continually. A couple of times he nearly spilled his drink by putting it down on the edge of a saucer. Marra's off-the-shoulder frilly blouse suited her well.

Tom pulled back, trying to summon visions of Larla laughing at him, and trying to superimpose her face on Marra's. No use. Marra's laugh was so obviously innocent and playful, it scattered whatever image he tried to conjure. She gave off so much energy Tom had to loosen his collar and roll up his sleeves to cool off.

"You're sure you're all right tonight?" she asked.

"Fine. Why?"

"You seem preoccupied. You didn't accidentally go back wearing your regular clothes or anything?"

"No." Tom hesitated. "There's this man I keep seeing."

"Tom, I had no idea." Her green eyes held a mock reproach.

"Not that. Either it's my imagination, or he's following me — in time. And I don't think it's my imagination."

(Continued to page 53)

# Solo for Concert Grand

## By Kristine Kathryn Rusch

### Art by Bob Eggleton

*To hear "Solo For Concert Grand" is to reach into the corners of one woman's mind. "Solo" was written to be played from memory in total darkness. The effect, then, is that of a lone voice, disturbing, dissonant and frightened. And the concert grand piano, an instrument so rarely used these days, adds an eerie alien quality. Toward the finale, the voice becomes smoother and stronger. The music ends on a triumphant note, which is a surprise when you know the piece's history: The composer, Emily Trenchon, committed suicide not twenty-four hours after writing the last note.*

—Albrecht, Alan  
Early Masters of the 21st Century

*Scenes from a private video:* A blur of blue and white. The camera slowly focuses in on the interior of a shuttle decorated with the Academy of Universal Languages logo. Children sprawl in the plush blue seats. Their expressions shocked, desolate. Some lie close, but none of them touch. The camera finds one: a girl, her long brown hair brushing her budding breasts. A badge on her blouse reads "Trenchon." Her fingers clutch at her pants, pull on the fabric, but the rest of her body is completely motionless. A man in a black business suit touches her shoulder and she recoils. He sets a thick, bound leather book beside her, speaks for a moment, then leaves. Hesitantly, she places her hand on the cover and runs her fingertip along the recessed lettering. Then she flips the book open. The camera zooms in on a page filled with musical notation, slowly pulling away until the girl is in the center of the frame. She peeks around her chair, then leans back. With a quick, vicious movement, she shoves the book onto the floor.

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The stage manager opened the dressing room door. "Curtain, Miss Trenchon."

Emily nodded and turned her back to him. She checked her appearance in the mirror, frowning at herself. The light caught the hollows in her cheeks, making her face seem more gaunt than usual. Maybe the gauntness was the "tragedy" that the *New York Times* music critic had seen the day he called her a "tragic beauty." The real tragedy was that he had found beauty in her thinness. Emily's last counselor had told her that she bordered on anorexic and Emily had left because the diagnosis was close to the truth.

A cacophony of strings, horns and winds greeted her as she hurried backstage. She stared out from the wings, over the violins, at the piano. The instrument gleamed under the lights. She had played that piano a hundred times and each review had mentioned her technical brilliance and emotional coldness. But on a rainy afternoon that reminded her of winter in Filkn Province, Phillip had walked in on her while she played Chopin. When she finished the etude and discovered him there, she had been astonished to see tears running down his cheeks. Her playing must have had emotion that day; Phillip was one of the harshest critics she knew.

She sighed and waited as the orchestra played the Bach. As the last note echoed in the hall, she smoothed her dress. A ripple of applause stunned her; it was too enthusiastic for the quality of the performance. Then she remembered. The audience was full of foreign diplomats, not music buffs. As the applause died, she started across the stage. The bright lights cast the audience in darkness, although the first three rows were filled with gray forms. The applause grew again, but she was steeling herself for the inevitable handshake before the performance.

She stared at Colson as she crossed the last few feet to the conductor's podium. His hand was long and slender, beautiful when it held a baton. Now, however, the hand unnerved her more than the uncaring audience to her left. When she reached Colson, she extended her own hand. The bones of her fingers were outlined in the light. His palm slapped into hers and the tightness of his grasp made her cringe. This time was no different from the others: his touch was empty. The emptiness frightened her. That was why she performed so miserably in concert. The handshake with the conductor froze her; the lack of emotion in every human touch reminded her of how hollow she had become.

Colson was watching her, trying to reassure her with his eyes. She wondered what he saw in her face. The fear, perhaps. And he would think it stage fright. She pulled her hand from his and faced the clapping crowd. Her eyes scanned the first three rows as she bowed. It wasn't until she stood upright again that she saw the Miasia. They sat toward the center, but their iridescent skin reflected the stage lighting. She felt prickly, as if a group of spiders had run down her back.

# Two Minuets

## Minuet I



OP. 54, No. 3

Somehow she managed to find her way to the piano. The orchestra began. She played her sections, but it was as if her body were a machine running on automatic. She could feel the Miasla sitting several yards away from her, feel their interest in music as entertainment. What was Mozart saying in Miaslan? She had purposely avoided translating classical music into that alien language, but if she concentrated, she could figure it out.

With effort, she made herself think of the notes. But they were separate entities, words in an alphabet, existing outside of the chords. She hadn't seen Miasla since she had been fourteen.

The third movement. Her hands were executing bouncy notes with a wooden finesse. There was nothing of Mozart in this music; there was nothing of Trenchon either. Only a shell built of notes played to an auditorium filled with two beings, both alien. They listened to the music politely even though to them it was a jumble of words, shouted at random.

At last, the concerto ended. She pulled herself to her feet, feeling the applause, feeling alien hands attempting the foreign sign of approval. As she turned to the audience, she searched for the iridescent skin winking in the light. They were clapping even though the striking of their oily flesh probably made no sound. She stood there, watching the long hands with no thumbs press together, as the applause became deafening.

Suddenly someone grabbed her arm and she wrenched away. Colson glared at her. She had forgotten to bow, and now, when she was supposed to walk with him to the wings, she stared like a stage-struck starlet at the audience. Her skin crawled where his fingers had gripped her. Turning slightly, she bowed at the audience, then stalked off stage.

"What the hell was that?" Colson asked when they reached the wings.

She couldn't tell him about the Miasla. He knew her history, of course. The entire world did. But understanding had never been part of that history. She rubbed her upper arm. "Don't ever touch me," she hissed.

"I didn't mean —"

"We had an agreement. No one touches me."

Colson bit his lower lip and stared out of the wings. The applause continued. "One more," he said.

They returned for another bow, and Emily kept her eyes carefully averted from the center seats. She ignored Phillip's attempt to catch her gaze from his chair as first violin. When she reached the wings a second time, she ran for her dressing room. Let the flocks clap all they wanted. They didn't understand what she was saying, perhaps because she didn't. She had never learned how to speak for herself; part of communication, she believed, was the listener's interpretation.

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Her nightmares are filled with making love. The first time — the only time — becomes a thousand times relived nightly in the theater of her mind. She is nineteen, desperate. Six of her friends have committed suicide. The last, Tommy, electrocuted himself in

the bathroom the night before. They are all under observation, as if the Academy expects them each to turn a weapon against themselves.

She wants to cut herself out of her skin, to join her intellect and emotion with those of another. When she was a child, the world had been full of emotion. She used to wish for a place where she could explore her own feelings without someone amplifying them or making the feelings go away. But now that she is trapped within herself, she almost wishes for the intrusion, if only to give her someone other than herself to hate.

This is when she goes to Jason's room. She sits on his bed and explains her proposition. *I have read, she says, that this is the ultimate human experience. It is a joining, a union, an act which makes two one.*

Jason hugs his knees to his chest. *We have to touch each other.*

Emily nods. When they had gotten back, the group tried touch experiments. The hollowness frustrated them, reinforced their isolation. It had been after a week of touching that the first suicide occurred.

*We're older now, she says. And this touching is supposed to be different.*

Fear makes Jason's skin taut. *Okay, he whispers.*

They return to Emily's room. She shows him passages she has outlined in books. For the experiment to succeed, they both need to know what they are doing. He closes the last book, then hides his face in his hands. *I can't.*

She says nothing at first, but begins to unbutton her blouse. The human male is stimulated by sight. As she slips the blouse off her shoulders, revealing her small pointed breasts, she calls his name.

Jason looks up at her and the color drains from his skin. *Don't, Emily.*

She takes off her pants and sits naked before him. He still doesn't move, although tears fill his eyes. She reaches over and takes his hand, steeling herself against the empty feel of it, and places it lightly against her nipple. He groans and tries to pull away, but she won't let him go. Suddenly his fingers close down on the breast itself. She closes the gap between them and begins to unbutton his shirt. Her knuckles brush against his skin and his movements become more frantic.

*Don't, Emily, please.*

Impatiently she removes his hand from her breast and yanks his shirt off. He brings his fingers back, fondling her. She undoes his pants, then tugs them down, and throws herself against him to keep either of them from pulling away.

The feel of skin against skin repulses her. She doesn't kiss him, can't bring herself to taste his flesh. They rub together. Jason's fingers have become weapons digging into her. She squirms under him, forcing him inside of her.

She is being divided in half by heat and flesh. Jason cries out in astonishment. He grabs her shoulders, pulling and pushing at the same time, and then collapses on her. Her groin throbs with pain and she wants to get away, but he is a dead weight on top of her. She pushes at his hips.

Jason, move.

The experiment has failed. She hates him, hates the feel of him, hates his heavy body on top of hers.

Jason!

She is going to scream if he doesn't move. It will drive her crazy, this heavy emptiness between them. Suddenly he pushes himself up on his arms. Tears are dripping from his eyes onto her cheeks. He separates his body from hers and there is a warm gush between her legs. He swipes at his face, backs away, then opens the door and runs out of the room.

Emily lies there, knowing that soon observers will come in and help her clean up. She should apologize to Jason, but she decides to wait until morning, already knowing that in the morning, Jason will be dead.

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*Trenchon became the Academy of Universal Languages's success story. She was the one they pointed to and said, "See? The project works. We just need several safeguards." They brought her before Congress every time a bill appeared to shut the Academy down. Trenchon had been the one who developed the Miaslan dictionary. She had survived the early suicides, and she had even gone on to make a career outside linguistics. Finally Congress gave in and passed a bill that allowed the Academy to continue the Child-Language Experiments. "The safeguards built into the law," said the president at the bill-signing ceremony, "will allow us to continue to send infants under the protection of their parents to other planets, to steep those young humans in a language and culture alien to us, but that will become, to them, as familiar as our own."*

— Smith, Newton

Ritual Sacrifice in the Name of  
Knowledge: The Child-Language Experiments

People knocked on her door and called out to her as they passed. "Brilliant tonight, Emily!" "You were stupendous, Emily!" "They loved you!" "Marvelous, sweetheart. No one does Mozart better."

It was the final knock, followed by "Phillip," that made her open the door. His collar was opened, bow tie untied and hanging beside the ruffles on his shirt. His bangs were drenched with sweat, but he smiled easily as if to hide the concern that wrinkled his brow. "Can I come in?"

She nodded and walked over to the piano bench. Her newest composition, a solo work written for piano, sat half-finished on the stand. She turned the page over, unable to look at it.

Phillip shut the door and collapsed in the easy chair. He stretched his long legs across the floor toward her. "What happened out there?"

She looked down at the polished piano keys. If she pressed them, she would create something she called music and something the Miasla called language. Only for them, it was a secondary language, their written word. Perfect because it communicated in emotion. Sometimes she thought that the great composers all knew how to speak Miaslan.

"Colson touched me."

"You were acting weird before that."

Phillip fancied himself her closest friend. And he probably was, in his way. He certainly understood her better than anyone else, perhaps because she trusted him. She told him more about herself than she had ever told another human being. "There were Miasla in the audience."

"A list of the visiting diplomats was in the concert bulletin," Phillip said.

"I never read those things."

He ran his fingers through his damp hair. "They'll probably come backstage," he said.

She froze. The shock that went through her must have shown on her face because Phillip added softly, "The program notes mentioned your 'pioneering efforts' in the Child-Language Experiments."

A shiver ran through her, leaving her with an almost physical desire. To touch a Miasla again. A true touch, with the flood of emotion and understanding. To be with a real empath and communicate once more, even if it were only for a few hours.

"Do you want me to stay?" Phillip asked.

"No," Emily said. "I think it would be better if you leave."

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*Film clip with audio:* The child steps out of the shuttle door, clutching a huge book to her chest. Reporters rush to her, but the adults surrounding her push back. "What was it like on Mias?" "Why did you write the dictionary?" "Were you closer to the Miasla than the other children?" "How does it feel to be home?"

The girl snaps her head up and looks at the last questioner. "Home? You expect me to call a planet I can't remember home?"

One of the adults takes her arm, but the girl wrenches away. "You want me to say something? I'll say something." She raises the dictionary over her head. "They" — and she looks at the black-suited man beside her — "think this is communication. It's nothing more than thoughts translated into sound, written on a page, translated into different sounds and turned into other thoughts. For this" — she shakes the dictionary — "they brought us back here."

She tosses the dictionary. People gasp and move out of the way as it lands on the pavement. "Someday, I'll show you what true communication is — if you can reach far enough out of your emptiness to find it."

The black-suited man scrambles after the dictionary. The girl stands by herself, as if her vehemence has frightened the crowd. The camera zooms in on her face. *Close-up:* Trenchon, with tears in her eyes.

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They didn't knock, they just entered, filling her dressing room with the pungent scent of their skin's oil. Emily rose slowly, but hovered near the piano's keyboard. She didn't recognize them.

The young one raised his *ilsoke* and plucked out: *Your strange use of the language amused me.*

She smiled and extended her hand for the small stringed instrument. He placed it in her palm without

(Continued to page 47)





# Letting Go

## By Elaine Radford

### Art by Charles Lang

A xenopsych who'd never seen an alien world, Charles Goshawk went directly from the embarkation cubicle of the coldsleep ship to the animal-drawn taxi that carried him out to Near City, the unglamorous human name for the ruined metropolis nearest the spaceport. What the guidebook called the majestic approach looked like nothing so much as a gigantic concrete anthill — until it was almost right on top of him, the anthill broken into a hundred knifeblade towers that pierced the sphere of the fat red sun. Awed by its scale, Goshawk briefly considered following the carefully marked perimeter trail. But no. He'd have to learn his way around here sometime. And who knew what he might discover? With the same impulsiveness that had led him to slip past his official guide at the spaceport, he plunged into the heart of the dead city.

A native scampered after him, its long ratlike snout quivering anxiously. "Please, sir, you must stay on the trail. It's dangerous."

Goshawk paused to study the alien, the first of its kind he'd seen. It was a short, furry biped, with the sharp features and quick hands of its rodentlike ancestors but none of the boldness of an Earth city rat. Having stopped when Goshawk did, although it was still several yards away, it stood with its silver-furred arms tense at its sides, its brief silver skirt as ungiving as an aluminum cylinder. "There are things falling, buildings collapsing all the time. We can't predict." Its squeaky accented English sounded like something learned from a computer.

"I'll be all right. I'm a scientist."

"Yes, sir, but please, it is dangerous." Its timid voice quavered, and Goshawk turned away, knowing it wouldn't stop him. With an eager, ground-eating stride, he continued on into the heart of the ruined anthill.

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The fractured sun was bleeding through the lower stories of the drab buildings when he realized that the native was still following him, scrupulously maintaining its distance while keeping Goshawk in its sights. Even as a silhouette against the weak sun, the figure looked stiff and tense, a robot pretending to be a man. Goshawk felt annoyed; on an impulse, he darted into the gaping entrance hole to a nearby skyscraper. There he paused, amazed at its secret beauty. The ancient walls were like the cup of an oyster shell, the outer walls a gray and crusted frame for the subtle

opalescence within. He wiped at the cracked and grime-coated support column nearest him; black came away on his fingers to expose the gentle glow of the original stone. Pearl and pink and deep sea blue shone brightest where the rosy rays of the dying sun slipped through the slitted bars of the narrow windows. The blue was the blue of Melissa's eyes ...

The alien's shadow fell across the doorway and for a moment they stood half in darkness. "Fine material, isn't it, sir? A great mystery how it was made."

Goshawk wished it would move. It was blocking his light. "Are all the buildings like this?" he asked.

"Oh, no sir, this is a plain one."

Only when Goshawk moved to a far corner did his guide enter the room. The light illuminated the vaguely pink stairs that led through a narrow passageway to the next floor. "Pity the guys who lived in the penthouse," he mumbled softly. The native, not understanding, made no reply.

"I bet a lot of junk is left up in some of these old rooms," Goshawk said.

"Oh, no, sir. There is nothing left." Its voice was squeaky again, urgent.

Goshawk laughed. "Sounds like you don't want me finding out, in any case."

"It's dangerous. The building is old, the stairs sag and break sometimes—"

"They're stone." Too obviously the little alien just wanted him back where he belonged. He began, instead, to climb.

The staircase was dark and twisty, like something inside an ancient castle on Earth. (He'd visited one once, in New York state, that had been transferred stone by filthy stone from Germany.) But this rock hadn't gone anywhere; it had collected the black dust of millennia undisturbed. He sniffled a bit, and his eyes began to water, but he wouldn't give the native the satisfaction of being right. Not yet.

He wound around several floors without seeing much of anything but dirt and darkness. The slitted windows grew higher than the setting sun, and in any case, the little guide had spoken truly. Everything was gone. It was hard for Goshawk to understand how a building came to be abandoned so thoroughly, yet with time enough to remove the last scrap of wastepaper. But apparently it was so.

He thought of the vague dreams of instant scientific glory that had danced through his coldsleep

wakening phase and laughed, a hollow sound that rattled oddly in his own ears.

The guide started at the unexpected sound, stumbling forward awkwardly, its hot breath suddenly on Goshawk's knee. He hadn't realized it had gotten so close behind him, but he never hesitated. The little guy was right; somebody could get hurt scrambling over these half-broken stones in the darkness. He reached out a hand to help it to its feet, smiling reassuringly. "Steady, there."

He wouldn't forget its eyes, the way they widened violently as his face and hand moved near. Too violently. It jerked away like an animal in a fit and tumbled backwards. There was a bounce and a sound of something cracking, and then another bounce. It hit the next lower landing and lay still, a gray indistinct shape that suddenly looked like stone.

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There was no one to notify, no one at all. His human employers expressed some annoyance that he'd managed to cause a fatal accident by wandering about before he'd been properly briefed, but they certainly had no desire to clear away the dead body of an alien. As for the natives themselves, it would be a miracle if another turned up to care for Near City this generation. To prevent a tragedy, some human would have to be scheduled to guide tourists around the site.

So once again Goshawk found himself watching the flat, cheap film he'd seen back on Earth, burning in the data his reflexes had forgotten in that crucial moment. With sickening fascination, once again he watched a small ratlike figure backed so far away from the camera that it seemed the viewer was looking through the wrong end of a telescope.

"We do not touch each other casually," it was saying in a measured, if slightly squeaky, voice. "That means no handshaking, no back patting, no comforting arm about the shoulders, no brushing against one another in a crowd. As a consequence, we avoid gathering in groups, which means that you cannot plan on routine meetings with any of us except the crazy ones..."

The taboo, of course, was what had brought him here. The philanthropic society that had hired him explained that it was up to him to eradicate the taboo against touch, which made these aliens impossible to civilize. What they didn't have to explain was why this important job went to Charles Goshawk, a diplomamill Ph.D. with no experience. They didn't have to. Everyone knew about the difficulties of convincing real scientists to go into coldsleep: why, you could wake up and find your problem solved, your existence redundant! But he'd had his reasons for taking the risk.

Melissa's face flashed into his mind, and he replayed the scene as if she'd been the one falling. Perhaps, in a sense, she was. Once he had hoped to save her, but she had leapt back from his love into the abyss ... and he had fled Earth forever, not just to prove himself a real scientist, but to save himself from leaping after her.

The film flickered to an end and the overhead light came on. Catherine Kenyon invited him to join her in

her office for some refreshment. "I think you see the problem," she said smoothly as she poured two small neat goblets of dark whiskey. "As long as the natives insist on dispersing themselves about the planet, it's impossible to establish any kind of factories, mining, manufacturing, even any decently productive level of agriculture. We simply can't guide them out of the Old Stone Age if they won't accept urban existence."

Urban, Goshawk realized, was an understatement. The ratbipeds didn't even tolerate villages, preferring to wander alone until chance brought two together for mating, who would soon part again. A sad and solitary species, their only society was the childhood spent near the mother, who taught them the basics of language and survival before abandoning them forever. "I'll need subjects," Goshawk said slowly.

"We've made a start with the psycho ward. A couple of the rats in there can tolerate several people at once, although even they get itchy if we move more than two or three of their own kind too close. We think it's something to do with the hormone balance, although it's hard to tell when we don't have any normals for comparison."

Goshawk nodded, considering the magnitude of the problem for the first time. Like the terrestrial rabbit, the Aurigan ratbiped had evolved a perfectly efficient reproductive system — copulation itself triggered ovulation. And just as the rabbit had once burrowed underneath Australia, undercutting the literal foundations of human civilization, the ratbipeds had overrun their planet, devouring competitors and resources alike, converting the surface of the world into a hodgepodge of ugly buildings spearing toward the sky — and also toward the inevitable crash.

The tales were harrowing, grim reminders of the fate Earth itself had so narrowly avoided. As the ecology of the ratbiped-choked world died, plagues, disasters, and epidemics of hunger multiplied. The rulers grew cruelly totalitarian out of the necessity to see that what little remained of the planet's goods would nourish all. When that became impossible, they used their power to snatch it for themselves. In the end, only those whose genes or trauma forced them to walk apart survived. Now their descendants wandered alone, rarely touching, rarely mating. The mothers fed their young on legends of the horrors made by ratbipeds in groups.

The psycho ward was more concept than reality, since the various patients had to be scattered throughout the human settlement. The nearest, a half-bald ancient Kenyon had nicknamed Sophocles, dwelt in a small one-room outbuilding behind the main offices. It seemed such a vision of wise old age that Goshawk had trouble remembering it was supposed to be crazy, although the alien itself strove to remind him. "We are a passionate species," it explained with apparent cheer. "If we meet, we mate or fight; if we mate, we breed; if we fight, we die. Alas, I was born with icewater instead of blood in my veins, and my strongest drive is but a thin curiosity, an obscene desire to truly *know* others, a terrible source of irritation to the wanderers I encountered." It shrugged

easily, without apparent bitterness, though Goshawk knew that it had been beaten many times for its differences before deciding to join the human colony.

"I suspect that the source of the taboo is the biological fact that in your species, closeness inevitably results in a disastrous rise in population," Goshawk said. "Now if we could develop a reliable birth control method, perhaps you could live together with less tension—"

The old ratbiped chuckled almost like a human being. "Surely there's nothing simpler than a barrier to prevent the trigger hormone from reaching the womb? An animal skin would do the job, I think. No, dear spacefarer, we wanted our children—along with the freedom to make their lives sweet. But our world proved too small. Now we wander alone, free in a way impossible when we crowded together."

"So you call civilization a prison. But is it freedom to flinch away from a helping hand?" Still aching with guilt but knowing that the old one's reaction might provide some valuable insights into the alien mind, Goshawk described his role in the death of the Near City guide.

To his horror, the ratbiped laughed again. "He killed himself, traveler, by venturing too close to you. Once he warned you not to turn from the trail, his responsibility was done. It was his own sick need to protect another that killed him—no doubt the same incipient sickness that drew him so near the obscenity of mass habitation. If he hadn't died then, he might even now be building his hut in your 'psycho ward.'"

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The young calico ratbiped dubbed Orbis sat trembling in its chair, its back resolutely against the open window of the small metal shed they'd assigned it. Its whiskers quivered slightly as it spoke. "It angers me that you've killed, although I know that isn't a normal reaction."

"And what would be a normal reaction?" Goshawk asked, his voice low and intentionally important for the benefit of the hidden cameras and microphones recording this interview.

The ratbiped hesitated. "I can't find the word... It's like some kind of awareness that it's a violation of a creature's dignity to mourn his fate?"

"You sound unsure."

"Your English lacks the words, or I haven't learned them yet..."

"Fate is an interesting word. What if I were to tell you that it was your fate to help me find a way to prevent similar accidents in the future?"

The ratbiped shrugged, a gesture it had learned from the humans. "You'll never teach the others to take the hands of humans when they won't even take the hands of their own kind!"

"But if I could, if you could help me to do this, think what a marvelous thing that would be for your people. They'd be able to work together, able to build, able to strive toward membership in the galactic family..."

"I like the rockets," Orbis said slowly. "The rockets are pretty. But you won't get the others to give up their—" It searched for the word.—"their freedom

for rockets and helping hands."

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Orbis was a prize. Day by day the young psychotic opened further to him, exposing its dark and alien mind to Goshawk's sly questioning. Already he could see the monograph: "Freedom as Loneliness: The Etiology of an Extraterrestrial Thought System." (Or should that be "Loneliness as Freedom"? ) If only they'd reached the stars before their great collapse, Goshawk thought, the choice between civilization and freedom wouldn't have been necessary: there's a lot of room and resources out there...

A banshee scream slashed knife-cold through his musings. Snatching up a jumpsuit, Goshawk pulled it on and rushed out to the little shed. For a moment, his brain refused to accept what his eyes recorded.

Two ratbipedes. He'd never seen two ratbipedes together before. But there was no time to savor the novelty. The half-bald Sophocles had its long claws at the throat of the young calico, who was flailing its arms impotently in the air over the ancient's head, unable to bring itself to touch the other even in self-defense. So the taboo was even stronger than we realized, Goshawk thought somewhere in the back of his mind. Meanwhile, his body moved forward to separate the aliens. But it was too late. Sophocles tore the young one's head from its cringing body.

"Why? Why?" Goshawk screamed. Running forward, psychology forgotten, he grabbed the old ratbiped and felt it slump limply in his arms. "I should kill you—" Sophocles rolled back its head and exposed its scrawny neck. *Go on, go ahead.* Sickened, Goshawk flung it savagely to the ground at his feet. "Why?" he asked again in a softer voice.

"She was helping you," Sophocles said slowly. "She wanted you to make our whole race as sick as she is, as sick as I am. How can she want us to crowd together like poisonous insects, stinging each other whenever there's no enemy to sting?"

"I don't understand," Goshawk said. "You've done a terrible thing."

"No one else could do it, no one else was sick enough to deliberately trace a path toward another for killing." The rat's tone had shifted into a peculiar monotone. *Violet*, Goshawk thought, or *indigo*, though how tone could have a color he couldn't say. "If we band together, we can't be free. If we can't be free, we violate fate. If we violate fate, we die..." The words became a chant, almost religious. Goshawk would get no more sense from the ratbiped that day.

And the next, at sunrise, the ancient screamed and passed away. There wasn't a mark on its deserted body.

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Damn them all, Goshawk thought more than once as he started all over again. Damn all aliens to eternal freezing, frigid hell. The other psychos were more willing to donate bits of tissue than bits of thought—scant help in understanding their strange psychology. As for their concern for the dead Orbis, they displayed as little as they'd shown in the demise of the Near City guide.

"It's inappropriate to mourn another creature's



fate," they explained over and over again in their patient squeaky voices. One thin gray ratbiped, who claimed that Goshawk had cured it—although it never quite managed to explain how—abandoned the project altogether, slipping back into the wilds to wander alone. Another talked of following its example, but couldn't quite get the courage to leave. "I find that I still have moments when I enjoy your conversation," it said ingenuously, as if confessing a fault.

"You make it sound as if I bored Picasso out of the ward," Goshawk replied with some irritation. He felt scraped with exhaustion, his third-rate training shining through.

"You're becoming a great teacher," the ratbiped said. "Did you know that in our language, 'teacher' and 'crazy one' is the same word?"

"Very funny."

"I don't jest, friend wanderer. Ask the translator if you don't believe me."

Reporting to Kenyon, he tried to make his discoveries sound like progress. "Most primitive cultures have a role for their abnormal individuals," he said. "Among the ratbipeds, the psychotic's role is that of the teacher because they remind the normals of the value of solitude — and not just by negative example. For instance, it's entirely up to psychotics to mete out punishment for infractions of society's rules. Although Sophocles acted alone when he executed Orbis, he was apparently perfectly within his tradition when he did so."

"Then why did he commit suicide?" Kenyon asked.

"I'm told it's because he, quote, soiled his soul by touching another when he wasn't really crazy enough to withstand the shock, unquote." Goshawk shrugged apologetically. He didn't understand it, either.

"Well, *that's* crazy, if you ask me," Kenyon sighed. "In other words, he gave his life to defend a way of living guaranteed to keep his kind at the Stone Age level. Why? What makes this pathological solitary state so attractive to them?"

"They call it freedom," Goshawk said.

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Kenyon received word that the ship scheduled for launching toward Auriga had been diverted to a more promising world. She was angry and disappointed when she reported the news to Goshawk. "The next won't be here for five more years and then it's going to remove the settlement if we can't show sufficient evidence of development."

"Impossible to develop planetary surface without alien cooperation." Bah! Haven't they ever heard of robots?"

Goshawk didn't bother to remind her that no one could continue importing tons of expensive equipment to an alien world without evidence of future reward. "So we have five years," he said quietly.

"Yeah, and if we don't show any progress by then, that's it. They're going to take us off. Leave the planet to the rats and the Neolithic."

Five years. Not very long to re-make a culture. But it was all the time he'd ever have.

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Over the years, many wanderers came and went. Mostly came. News of the human-run psycho ward made its desultory way across the primitive planet, drawing the sick and the crazy from far and wide. Some progress, then, Goshawk tried to tell himself; they'd built quite a little community, even if the huts were an acre or two apart from one another. Unfortunately, he was as far from getting the aliens to work together as he'd ever been.

"Don't you ever group together?" he kept asking, and the various ratbipeds kept replying, "Sure. Us psychos do it lots of times. Whenever we need to teach." But the fact that their "lots of times" wasn't quite the human definition became obvious as years passed without their once feeling the need for "teaching." Whatever that was. He often got the impression that it was little more than a lynch mob, in which case it might be a good thing he'd failed to provoke them.

"Three months," Kenyon said one day when she stopped by his office. "Three months and we're off this stinking, no-good world."

Goshawk tried to laugh. "Oh ye of little faith. Don't you think I can convince them to continue the project?"

"Are you kidding? Half the terraform planets have free labor, kiddo. Why waste time with this one? If it wasn't for the society's desire to help these little creeps, we'd never have come here to begin with."

"So you've given up," he said quietly.

She shrugged. "I guess I have, Charles. You know, when I first came here, I had nothing but the highest ideals. But now, hell with 'em. You can't help somebody who doesn't want to be helped."

"I'm not willing to write them off, just like that. I've given the best years of my professional life to this project."

"You'll be well paid."

"Ah, Catherine, it isn't the money—"

She touched his hand briefly. "Charles, Charles."

Something trembled below the cool efficiency that Goshawk had learned she carried even to bed. "I know that. But you're going to have to stop caring pretty soon. Either that, or see your heart torn out."

"There's a third option," he said softly as he tried to squeeze hope into her soft hand. "Success. I will have wanderers working together before the ship lands. I will, Catherine. Even if I have to hold a gun to their ungrateful little heads."

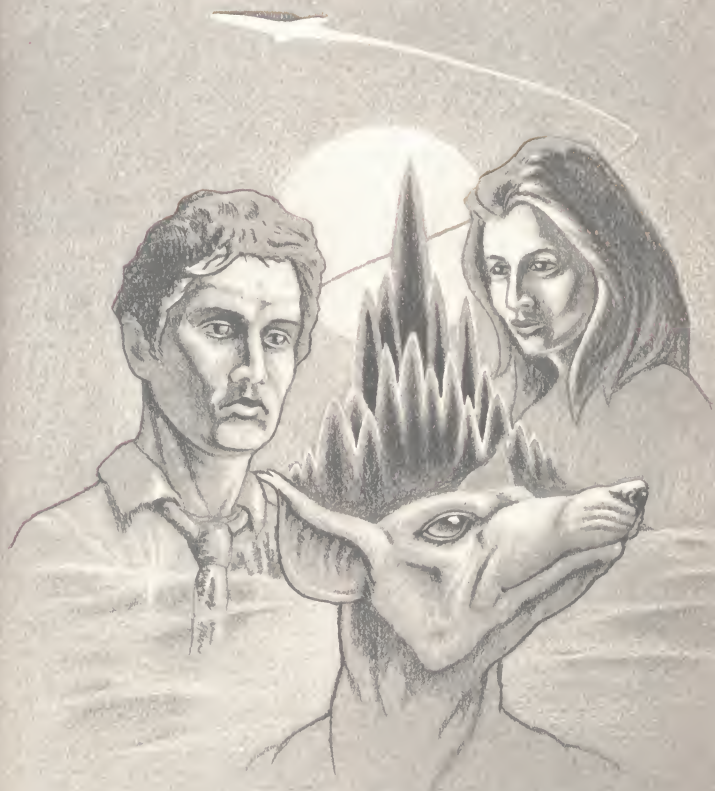
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It was only a figure of speech. But as week slid after week, it became much more. First an idea that thumped in his brain at night, then a vision that subtly shaped his daytime plans. Time was running out. Force was the only way. He hated to do it, but sometimes violence was justified. You couldn't just stand by and watch someone commit suicide.

He'd made that mistake with Melissa, leaving her alone when she pushed him away, leaving her alone to die. He wouldn't make it again.

He picked four of the craziest wanderers and three of the most bigoted humans. The humans got guns. The wanderers got hoes. Goshawk directed the





little group to a weedy field and ordered them to dig.

And after all their bitching, nobody snapped. He'd expected screams of torment, foaming at the mouth, convulsions. Instead, the wanderers merely worked, their backs stiff and their postures tentative as they scratched out a small patch of rich earth. "Wonderful, terrific!" he told them. "I knew you could do it." The oldest of the crazies rolled its eyes at him and said nothing. The other three acted as if they hadn't even heard. The field was very quiet, since the aliens seemed to have decided not to talk and the humans were really too embarrassed. Fine. Fine. If playing dumb helped them feel as if they were alone, great. If that was all there was to it, he was a fool for not having forced them together a long time ago.

"They'll take off in the night," Kenyon predicted. But they didn't. Goshawk hadn't selected the four craziest for nothing. The next day they were back at work, sullenly dropping seeds into raggedy holes. Progress!

By the end of the week, the ratbipeds were showing definite signs of exhaustion. Goshawk felt a twinge of guilt when the oldest collapsed under the cloudless noon sky and had to be carried back to its shed for rest. But any sacrifice they were called upon to make was worth it. After all, he was giving them the universe.

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They came in the night, their small blasters glowing blue, their neat skirts replaced by fluorescent hoods and robes. Goshawk sat up slowly, thinking he was dreaming. Only when one of the four took him by the arm did he realize that they were wanderers, no doubt the same four he'd put to work in the field.

Shivering slightly in his shorts as they led him out the door, he bubbled over with questions. "Where do you cache this stuff? Is it left over from the old civilization? Must be, since you don't have any manufacturing. Is it accessed only by psychos or does everybody—?" A blaster poked cruelly in his naked ribs, silencing him. Goshawk shut up and finally admitted to himself that he was frightened.

They walked past the bruised field and on into the forest. Goshawk's bare feet flopped clumsily through twig and leaf, crunching out vaguely threatening sounds. The wanderers flanked him like a quartet of alien ghosts. It occurred to Goshawk that he finally had his evidence that the aliens could work together. He tried not to imagine what this evidence might cost him.

The stars were cold and bright over the small, recently formed clearing. Goshawk felt his gorge rise as he saw first the small, hacked stumps that had once been slender trees, then the carousel. It was a benign-looking structure of limb and vine, with a single seat protruding from the center like a hand at the end of the arm.

Or like a rock at the end of a whirling string. Goshawk yanked away as he suddenly realized what it was. "No! No!"

One of the ratbipeds aimed the blaster, singeing Goshawk's left foot with uncanny precision. The blue light burned a cruel hole into the earth by his toe. He

had his choice: die now or take his chances with the carousel. He slumped into the wooden seat and let them secure him with ropelike vines, resisting once more only when they held a small bottle of burning liquid to his mouth and forced him to drink. A wave of a blaster convinced him to swallow what he'd started to spit out.

Now that he was bound by rope and drug, the aliens dropped their weapons and took hold of one of four lengths of vine attached to the great wheel. Slowly, slowly, they began their dance, their fluorescent outlines swaying hypnotically, pinning his vision to the pattern they made as they moved. They trapped his ears with their piercing voices, their alien song focusing his attention on words he couldn't quite understand. Slowly, ever so slowly, the carousel began to turn.

I can get out, he thought. I can work my way out of these vines in time. He flexed the muscles in his arms and felt a definite give. Yes. Yes!

The carousel sped up, and dizziness took him. Then the aliens were running, their hoods a single crazy blur. The drug mated with the motion and the song to produce terrifying visions—

Faces began to spin before him, multiplying madly until they filled earth and sky. Nothing green remained. Millions toiled, and a rocket containing three blasted forth from the surface. Millions toiled and watched TV and wondered if they'd be able to visit the forest that year. What forest? Millions toiled at recreation and the forest was a herd of dirty wanderers, only one of which caught sight of the last butterfly winging by...

It doesn't have to that way, Goshawk screamed at the visions. We have wild places, freedom — more than freedom. We have a galaxy of stars to share ... But the visions were implacable. He saw wanderers by the million working on assembly lines and listening to stories about the good life on the radio while only a few were rich or learned enough to ride the rockets. He saw.

Seeing, he stopped fumbling with the vines. He felt himself spin out of control. Faster. Faster. Faster. The fluorescent blur had disappeared — the aliens had set him free — and still he spun. Twigs snapped like shots. And then came darkness.

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He awoke to a body that throbbed in every bone. If he'd unwound the protective vines, he would have surely flown to his death at the height of the carousel ride. The symbolism was obvious, Goshawk thought wryly. By abandoning his fate to nature's instruments, he'd won a survival his cleverness at breaking the bonds would have lost him. A strange lesson. His moment of complete emotional understanding of that alien concept was already draining from his system with the last of the drug.

Only the shadow of an echo of an understanding remained. An hour before, he had felt, as strongly as any wanderer, that the only true path is the path you make alone. Now, drifting once more into what he considered his right mind, he didn't know what to think. His teachers had meant to teach him to let go,

but perhaps all they had taught him was that the alien is truly alien and that the stranger sometimes walks a strange path.

He was surprised that his four teachers cared for him together. "Oh, we're totally bonkers by now," Aristophanes said cheerfully. "We almost *like* working together." The wanderer shrugged ruefully, a gesture learned from Goshawk.

"I can't reach out my hand and jerk you into the future," Goshawk said slowly. "I see that now. But how can you ask me to turn and walk away?" He could never walk away from an injured thing, never, not after Melissa. Yet playing the savior-scientist hadn't worked either: this time they had tried to teach him, but next time they might simply kill him. The way of life that had saved their species was at stake.

"We aren't asking you to walk away," Aristophanes said softly. "We have dealt with you as one of our own, because you have given us crazy ones

a home." The wanderer paused a moment, as if checking the rightness of that final word. "You see, we have always had a place among our people. But we've never had a home."

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Goshawk noticed that Catherine couldn't quite bring herself to give him a final hug. She'd already written him off.

"There might not be another ship in your lifetime, you know," she warned him. "The society isn't obligated to save you from your own foolishness."

"Thank God," Goshawk said with a painful smile. He was remembering a hand that had reached out ... and propelled a frightened being to its death. "I think I have a lot to learn here. And maybe even a little to teach."

Later, he stood with four friends watching the silver shuttle arc toward heaven.

— ABO —

## Solo

(Continued from page 39)

touching her. She plucked: *We use music differently than you do.*

The other shook his head, the light reflecting off his scales. She had forgotten how strange they looked. Their eyes were rounder than she remembered, their nostrils smaller and their eating cavity wider. Both of them had their earflaps up, so she knew they were listening to her intently.

*Your audience seemed to understand it.*

*They enjoyed it. There is a difference.* Emily's breath was coming quickly. Now that she was with Miasla again, she didn't know how to behave. *Are you from Filkn?*

They shook their heads slightly, indicating their familiarity with human traditions.

*Filkn is where I'm from,* she said.

The aliens looked at each other, then raised their eyebrows in a polite smile. The smaller one extended his hand for his *ilsoke* while the other said, *We have much business. We came only to pay our respects.*

They were leaving. Emily felt fear course through her. She grabbed a single string and it shrilled, *Wait! Would one of you — she stopped and then made herself finish. It has been so long since I have truly talked to someone. Will one of you touch me?*

The Miaslas' hands brushed. The envy Emily felt at that moment of instant communication nearly stabbed her. Then the smaller one took both of the *ilsokes* and left the dressing room. The other Miasla extended his hands.

Emily took them in her own, feeling first the sickness of his scales. Then, suddenly, he was inside her, filling her with his curiosity, taking her envy, looking at it and tossing it aside. Then he reached in deeper and found her repugnance for other human beings. This he brought out and played with, making it stronger, deeper. Emily tried to pull the emotion back. This wasn't what she wanted. She didn't want

him to see her hatreds, only to bring out the warmer emotions. She struggled, trying to push him from her, and unable to because she was not an empath — only a strong empathic receptor.

The Miasla suddenly alighted on her terror and pulled back. He sent little waves of apology through her, shoved the repugnance into its corner and let go of her hands. They stared at each other for a moment, then he turned and left the room.

Emily started shaking. His touch brought back Filkn, the nights she crawled into her bed, wishing the empaths would leave her alone. She had been their darling, their favorite. They loved her quick temper and sudden mood swings. They used to grab her as she walked through the grove of rope-trees to her parents' home in the foreign section and invade her with thoughts, feelings, and probings. She was an alien thing, a toy, something they could experiment with. Only Saheesha had seen Emily as a sentient being. Saheesha had taught Emily how to use the musical language so that she could communicate with Miasla without subjecting herself to their touch.

She grabbed the piano and eased herself onto the bench. This was the feeling Jason had had when he committed suicide: violated and used. She had learned that feeling from the Miasla, and then she had turned around and used it against one of her own kind. But all along she had praised the Miasla. Fear of that touch had become fear of all touch. She had made herself believe that it was the sterility in human beings she hated, when it was really the sterility in herself. She was neither Miaslan nor human but a hybrid, the product of an overzealous group of scientists who thought that a child's learning capacity was all they needed to understand another culture. They forgot that children learn more than language as they grow older. Children also learn how to survive in the world around them.

Saheesha had taught Emily music. Music helped Emily survive.

She grabbed the composition paper off the stand and began thumbing through it. Jason had had

nothing. She had the music. And if she wrote this piece right, she would achieve the perfect communication she had always been searching for.

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*"Solo For Concert Grand" is the work of a master, the culmination of a lifetime of experience and pain. Trenchon lives in these notes. Some say that's why she had to die. A person can't exist in two places at once.*

—Albrecht, Alan  
Early Masters of the 21st Century

She poured herself into the music. The notes rang out in the darkness, jarring her as they echoed off the walls. It flowed, just like it had flowed when she wrote it. The sounds existed separately from the hammers striking the strings, as if they pulled something from the darkness and gave the darkness life. She hunched over the keyboard as she reached the finale. The music pounded at her, struck her back, her ears. She wished she had earflaps like the Miasla so she could cut out part of the sound because it overwhelmed her. The piece had more power than she dreamed she was capable of. She played the final chord and let it mingle with the silence.

When the echoes had died away, she reached over and flipped on the light, expecting to find Phillip in tears as he had been the afternoon she played the Chopin. He sat rigidly in his chair with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Why does it have to be played in the dark?"

His hostility startled her, frightened her, and her jubilation melted away as if it had never existed. "I'm — not sure," she said. She had been in a creating frenzy since the Miasla left and when she finally finished the piece, she had gone to Phillip's and dragged him out of bed so that he could hear what she had done.

"I don't know what you're trying to say, Emily," he said. "Or if I do, I don't like it much."

"But —"

He held up his hand to silence her. "Why don't you leave it and let me look at it in the morning? Maybe it just hit me wrong tonight."

She nodded and pushed back his piano bench. It took all of her strength to keep from running to the door. Once she reached it, she stepped out into the cool evening, feeling like she had when she stepped out the shuttle doors holding the dictionary. Only this time there were no reporters to greet her, no one to get angry at. What had happened in there was that she had suddenly reversed roles with Jason. She was the one who gave to an unappreciative audience. But unlike Jason, she had chosen to give. The audience had asked nothing of her. She had chosen to place herself, naked, before Phillip, and he disliked what he saw.

The evening air was damp and impersonal, like the air on Mias. She shivered and rubbed her arms, as she used to do when she left Saheesha's. She had come full circle. The Miasla took from her, then she took from Jason, and now, with her music, she would have to let someone take from her again. She was a hybrid,

like the others who had grown up on Mias. But she was the strong one — the genetically pure creation whose seeds would be used again and again. The Academy would create more hybrids, more warped human beings with no culture and no companions, and sacrifice those hybrids to the false god of knowledge when all that god gave in return was useless information.

Inside, Phillip shut off the lights. She stood under the porch light and felt the shadows grow around her. She was the Academy's success story, their reason for existing. The lack of reporters didn't matter. She would commit one final act of communication, and of course, the Academy's interpretation would be wrong. They would think she had joined the failures, the weak ones, when actually she was proving her strength.

She stepped forward into the darkness: a lone voice, performing solo to a vast audience.

—ABO—

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# ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

## Encore Performances

In this issue you'll recognize many names from their delightful work in previous issues. There are also a few newcomers making their debut with *ABO*.

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH brings us "Solo for Concert Grand," and reveals how true intimacy can be a poisonous thing. She is also the author of "Sing," from our third issue.

Rusch's writing is not limited to one medium or style. Her short story "Phantom" will be appearing in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine. She has written educational radio scripts on literary figures including Joseph Conrad, Robert Browning and Virginia Woolf for public radio, and she recently wrote an article on a block-long bookstore in Portland called Powell's Books for *Publisher's Weekly*.

Rusch says she is part of "quite a writing group going on in Oregon." The "Pulphouse Gang" as they call themselves, has about 20 members who meet in a workshop every week. They include a half-dozen SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) members and some Writers of the Future workshop alum like Rusch, so they tend to "lean toward science fiction," she says.

Both of Rusch's stories for *ABO* have been illustrated by BOB EGGLETON, and once again the result graces our cover.

In case some people notice a similarity between his other illustration for "Solo" and the poster for the film *E.T.*, Eggleton says, "The coincidence isn't intentional; it just worked out that way and, considering the story is radically different from the *E.T.*

story, I see no problem."

Eggleton's career has recently taken a turn in the horror direction, with covers for *TOR Horror* and an illustrated book, *Crucifix Autumn*, for Dark Harvest.

In the coming weeks you'll be able to see Eggleton's work in *The Forever City*, an illustrated book by RICHARD LUPOFF. He's also been doing some



John E. Stith

mystery cover art for G.K. Hall's Agatha Christie books.

"Little Black Book," in this issue, reveals the lengths some men will go to to pick up women. It's written by JOHN E. STITH, who wrote "Doing Time" for issue No. 5.

Stith was recently a guest panelist on an experimental television program on science fiction cosponsored by NASA and Michigan State University (see my column in issue No. 6). The live program, which mingled writers, artists and fans through a lot of interactive satellite technology, was not rehearsed. Stith says it was a "little rough" and a "real busy show" but "went pretty well."

Stith's newest novel for Berkley/Ace, *Deep Quarry*, is due out in mid-1988.

He is also going to be the invited guest of honor at an SF convention called Bubonicon in Albuquerque in August. I'm sure he'll be plagued by autograph seekers.

Artist BYRON TAYLOR makes his second appearance in *ABO* with illustrations for "Little Black Book."

Taylor, who hails from Little Rock, Ark., and has lived all his life in the South, recently moved with his family to Providence, R.I., and is experiencing his first New England winter.

Taylor is over six feet tall, and says, "People tell me I can always put more clothes on. But my feet and hands are always cold."

People also tell him, "Just wait until there's a two-week stretch where it doesn't get above the teens. I say, 'Yeah, I can wait.'"

Taylor recently did some page design work for the *Providence Journal* and an illustration for its magazine.

He's also excited about a sculpture class he's taking. As he says in his molasses-smooth voice, "It's been real fine."

ELAINE RADFORD is the author of "Letting Go." The rat-like creatures in this story would make Greta Garbo seem gregarious.

Radford also brought us the story "Passing" in issue No. 4.

She is a writer who specializes in bird and animal topics and is a regular contributor to *Bird Talk* magazine. Her first book is *A Complete In-*



roduction to *Cockatiels*, published in January 1987 by TFH publishers.

Radford has a closet-sized aviary in her living room and breeds birds from exotic places like the Australian desert and the Chinese Himalayas.

But she had to give up breeding button quail when she moved into an apartment, she says, because they tend to have about 20 young at a time, and like to run around.

She is also busy collecting bird, reptile and fish photos for a stock photo file business she has started with partner ROGER WILLIAMS.



Elaine Radford

"Letting Go" is illustrated by CHARLES LANG. He and artist wife WENDY SNOW LANG live in Salem, Mass., which is fitting, because Charles has become well known for his work in horror and the macabre.

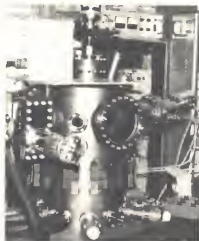
He's just finished a cover for the book *Charnel House*, by GRAHAM MASTERTON, the fourth cover he's done for a Masterton book.

He and Wendy attend many SF conventions, and will be guests of honor at a small horror convention, Necon, in Rhode Island in July.

"Eve and the Beast" is ROBERT METZGER's third story for *ABO*. The other two were "An Unfiltered Man," in issue No. 6, and "True Magic," in issue No. 7.

Metzger sent us a photo of the original "Beast," which he built over four years at UCLA.

Its official name is a Silicon Molecular Beam Epitaxy system. Metzger says, "It grows silicon films an atomic layer by atomic



The Beast

layer. And it does it damn slow."

It was designed "to create crystalline materials that Mother Nature never dreamed of."

I noticed that "Beast" and "True Magic" both contain unforgettably vicious portraits of obnoxious graduate thesis advisers.

Metzger, who survived graduate school to get his Ph.D. in semiconductor physics, says his thesis adviser at UCLA was actually pretty tame. "He never talked to us, but he didn't get in our way," he says. "But I've seen some really, really bad ones."

He says horror stories about egotistical academics have created a universal bond among those who've been through graduate school.

He says the part in "Eve and the Beast" when Timothy Henderson fantasizes about tire irons was taken from a real-life incident.

At Stanford some years ago, a mathematics graduate student who had been working on his thesis for 17 years walked into his professor's office one day and killed him with a tire iron, he says.

Metzger says that, soon after that, photocopies of the news article started mysteriously appearing on other professors' doors. "Any grad student who tells you that the idea has never occurred to them is either brain dead or lying," he says.

I also correctly guessed which prominent real scientist Professor Grant Sheffield is loose-

ly based on, but you'll have to figure that out for yourself.

LARRY BLAMIRE illustrated both of Metzger's previous stories. His illustration of Rasputin, the toad from "True Magic," was actually the first "true likeness" of our Alien Publisher and will grace its column from now on. The toad has also become a favorite among *ABO* staff members.

Blamire's back with illustrations for Metzger's "Eve and the Beast." Larry is *ABO*'s own Renaissance man, an artist, actor and playwright. Come to think of it, Shakespeare could act and write, but I doubt he could do such a bang-up job illustrating science fiction.

Now for some newcomers.

ANN K. SCHWADER brings us "Muttmind." After reading her story, I think it's about time for bitches to come out of the closet. (And if you don't like that idea, you can go jump in a lake. Wow, how much better I feel already.)

Schwader just sold a story called "In the Airlock," which she calls "an SF/horror crossover in the Lovecraft style," to a new magazine called *Revelations from Yuggoth*, which publishes H.P. Lovecraft-inspired fiction.



Larry Blamire

Schwader's English master's thesis was titled "A Starship of One's Own: Women's Science Fiction in America, 1930-1969."

I asked her about female contributions in the early SF days, and she says, "There were a lot more women writers from the

beginning than people are aware of. A lot of them wrote under initials or ambiguous names, like Leigh Brackett."

Look for a poem by Schwader, "Same Song, Different Star," in an upcoming issue.

The art for "Muttmind" is done by DAVID R. DEITRICK, who has made his home in Alaska after living in 10 other states in his lifetime, much of that during a stint as an army officer.

He, artist wife LORI, and two boys live southwest of Anchorage. It's miles away from cable TV, but less than a mile from a Federal Express drop box.

He calls it "the closest thing to being on a space colony, high technology next to a harsh environment."

Deitrick said back when he worked on an oil field he was a "boomer," someone who advocated progress and bulldozers, but now he has become a preservationist, a "greenie."

"I was always a closet environmentalist," he admits. "You don't pee in your bathtub."

Deitrick is known as "Joe Game." He has done more than 60 game covers in the past 10 years, including illustrations for the *Star Trek* role-playing games and the



Ray Aldridge

Traveler game series.

He said his work on the BattleTech game series involved designing 80 costumes and uniforms for the warring houses. "It was like pre-production design for a movie."

This *ABO* work is his first for a magazine.

RAY ALDRIDGE's premiere piece for *ABO* is the story

"Boneflower."

He says the story grew out of an exercise at a Writers of the Future workshop in Taos a year ago.

He was supposed to do some library research and talk to a stranger, so, "being lazy," he ended up talking to the librarian, who told him many stories.

One tale involved a mountain nearby where, at a certain time of the year, water falls across the mouth of a cave. Local Native Americans believe if a person stands under this waterfall, it wipes away their melancholy.

That idea, and Aldridge's own belief in the idea of equilibrium, came together in "Boneflower."

Aldridge says he has been lucky since that workshop. "I started writing six months before it. I sold one thing before Taos and I've sold seven things since then."

They include the stories "Eyebright" and "The Flesh Tinker and the Loneliest Man" to *Amazing*, and "The Touch of the Hook" and "Floating Castles" to *Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

Aldridge makes his living as an artisan. He has been a potter and stained glass designer for the past 15 years.

He and his "head shrinker" wife, NANCY, had their first child, APRIL ANN, on August 28 and had to be moved out of their apartment three days later. That must have been fun.

"Boneflower" is illustrated by CORTNEY "Hasn't Missed an Issue" SKINNER, our most frequent artist contributor.

Skinner says it will be a combination painting/sculpture/*trompe-l'oeil*, and like a well-executed diorama in a museum, solid objects should blend into background to give an authentic period feel.

size of a phone booth, Skinner will try to give passersby the illusion that they are peering into a turn-of-the-century bookstore.

Skinner says it will be a combination painting/sculpture/*Trompe-L'oeil*, and like a well-executed diorama in a museum, solid objects should blend into background to give an authentic



Cortney Skinner

period feel.

It's a dandy project for Skinner, who is both an artist and a student of history.

BONITA KALE is the author of the poem "From a New World." Her image of children at play stuck in my mind, so I asked her if she has any children.

Well, she has three, 16, 13 and 9 years of age, and she once sold an article entitled "Living with Preschoolers." (To a horror mag, perhaps?)

She now has a children's book making the rounds of publishers. This is her first SF sale.

The infamous *ABO* questionnaire asks contributors to name an interesting thing they've done lately, and I loved Kale's answer. She writes "I am a writer, a wife and a mother. (So) all my interesting events are a.) internal b.) unmentionable or c.) someone else's!"

*ABO* also welcomes two people who will be writing regular features for us.

In "Star Cops: Frog or Prince?" SUSAN ELLISON gives us a review of an SF/detective series about solving crimes in space.

There's no mistaking the British origins of Ellison, once you've heard her sparkling voice.

A full-time writer now living in California, she says she tries to stay "au courant" on both sides of the Atlantic.

She says an alarming new trend in British television is censoring the violence in American TV series like "The Equalizer."

"I'm not in favor of violence, but I'm less in favor of censor-

ship," she says.

She began writing animation scripts with a series called "Dinosauers" and has done several scripts for Walt Disney and others since then.

She enjoys working in that medium. "You treat it the same as live-action scripts, but you can do more. A character can suddenly shoot off into space and you don't have to worry about the logistics."

Ellison and husband HARLAN ELLISON celebrated their first wedding anniversary in September.

Susan says she met Harlan in Scotland. He was giving a lecture and she went up afterwards to speak to him.

"It was love at first sight for



Susan Ellison

me," she says. And "in the space of a month" she was married and on her way to the U.S.

JANICE EISEN, who will be doing a book review column (that's in addition to DARRELL SCHWEITZER's column), can't be called a newcomer to ABO. She has been an assistant editor here since the second issue.

She got her bachelor's degree from MIT two years ago, and while there was president of the MIT Science Fiction Society.

She married another MIT student, KEN MELTSNER, who got his Ph.D. in materials science.

They moved up to Schenectady, N.Y., in December so he could take a job with General Electric, and she has taken up writing.

The apartment they are living in is in a building that used to be a department store, she says.

The renovators left the floor directory intact near the elevator, so she knows that she lives on the floor that once housed the toy department.

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Budding artists/illustrators, take notice. Several ABO artists have been tapped to be judges for a new contest being sponsored by Writers of the Future.

It's called Illustrators of the Future and, like its writing counterpart, it is meant to find and cultivate new talent.

Well-known artist KELLY FREAS is organizing it. He says they're hoping to offer three awards of \$500 each on a quarterly basis, and a \$4,000 grand prize to artists, who will illustrate winning stories appearing in Writers of the Future anthologies.

"Our whole objective is to give kids a leg up. Artists are a dime a dozen. But illustrators are hard to come by," Freas says.

And what a stable of judges Freas is putting together, from the "extremely fine art" illustrators LEO and DIANE DILLON to the "grand old man" of comics, JACK KIRBY.

From the older generation, Freas has recruited such legends as EDD CARTIER and H.R. VAN DONGEN.

Judges from the younger generation include ABO contributors BOB EGGLETON, and VAL LAKEY LINDAHN and RON LINDAHN.

Other illustrators he mentioned as judges were FRANK FRAZZETTA, DON MAITZ, ALEX SCHOMBURG, JEAN GERARD MOEBIUS and PAUL LEHR.

The judging will rotate, with five judges on a panel at one time.

He says as illustration director, he will comment on portfolios sent in by aspiring illustrators, either inviting them to enter the contest, or giving them feedback on what they have to work on.

Contestants will have to have limited national publishing experience, but otherwise, "We're trying to keep it as wide open as possible," he says.

Freas says the organizers will give winners an expenses-

paid trip to the annual award ceremony, and tout their accomplishments to local television stations and newspapers.

Freas and Writers of the Future officials say more details will be forthcoming in January. When I talked to Freas in December, it seemed he could hardly wait to get started.

"This is the hottest thing for kids to hit any part of the art field for years," he says.

—ABO—

## Boomerangs

(Continued from page 31)

sub ends with issue #12.

Hooked forever,  
Michael R. Millett  
Beverly, MA

To the editors,

I loved the Nov.-Dec. issue. The stories and art were outstanding.

I think the alien publisher has a problem understanding us humans. First, economics is not the "human study devoted to money," but is the science treating of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services or the material welfare of mankind. Second, money is not a "promise to be honored by a whole human society," but a commodity, which is defined as an article of trade or commerce, especially a product as distinguished from a service. I hope this will help the alien better understand us humans. (*I doubt it, it seems to prefer the obtuse, but are you interested in helping me balance my checkbook?* — Ed.)

The book reviews by Mr. Schweitzer I thought were right on except for the statement about "science fiction readers hate horror." I read your magazine and I like good horror stories, but then I like Shakespeare. Thank God I am not a hardcore science fiction fan.

Lastly, I have enclosed a check for \$28 to renew my subscription for another 18 issues. (*May everyone follow your sterling example.* — Ed.)

Yours,  
Gavin W. Spore  
Santa Ana, CA

—ABO—

# Black Book

(Continued from page 35)

Marra lost her animation. "The government?"

"I wondered about that at first. But they would have done something by now. Besides, my activities don't amount to much. I hardly think they'd strand me for going back to have a date with someone whose timeline dead-ends."

"What does this guy look like?"

Tom described the dark-haired man as well as he could. He'd seen him only at a distance or in poor lighting.

"So, what do you think?" Tom asked after a long silence.

"I don't know." Marra gave him a troubled glance.

"Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to share my problems." Somehow Marra sad was every bit as appealing as Marra happy. "Don't worry about it. He can't be government." But he could be. For all Tom knew about cases like this, the man was thoroughly documenting Tom's activities before filing his report.

They finished dinner with only occasional bursts of conversation.

As they rose to leave, Tom claimed he was so tired that he should take her home. Marra had been looking livelier as time went by, but now the light in her eyes faded. If he could have changed his mind without being exposed as a liar, he would have, but Marra made no attempt to reverse his decision. She was uncommonly quiet during the tube ride.

Tom finally reached his apartment feeling unexpectedly depressed but not sleepy enough to avoid noticing the bonsai white cedars. They still drooped.

A small indicator in the planter said the pH was too high. He carefully added the calculated quantities of water and fertilizer. Only six months ago they were doing so well he'd had to cut them back a little almost every week. It was all he could do to keep their height at twenty-five centimeters.

In the briefing room the next day, Marra was slightly less animated than usual until Tom asked her out again. They decided on an outing several days away.

Tonight, Linda should be able to take his mind off Marra. If the man was from the government, one more trip couldn't make anything worse. If he was a figment, that wouldn't matter either. One shower and a change of clothes later, he hurriedly set the controls. At the Hilton bedside table, he tapped in Linda's phone number.

"Hi. It's Tom. How about a movie tonight?"

"Tom who? I'm afraid you've got the wrong number."

Tom's stomach tightened.

"Come on. Don't kid me. It's been a hard day."

"I'm not kidding. You've got the wrong number," Linda's voice said.

On impulse, Tom glanced at his watch. Oh, no. 1976. He was two years too early. Flustered, he apologized and hung up. He had to be more careful. Minutes later, on May 22, 1978, he tried again, this time with

success.

The movie was *A Star Is Born*, the 1976 version. Tom had already seen the other six versions in first-run theaters. Halfway through the movie, he decided that he liked the 2002 holo version and the 1937 original the most.

Earlier in the day, Tom had wondered briefly if it was worth all the trouble to keep his little black book current, but the question faded away as he was caught up in the movie again.

Near the end of the movie, the popcorn buyers had long since slowed down, but one last man made his way past. As the dark-haired man edged along in front of Tom, he managed to step squarely on Tom's foot. "So sorry," he said.

Tom paid more attention to his foot than he did to the man, but as the man moved on, a short brightly lit scene illuminated his face. He had to be the same man.

Tom could no longer pretend the encounters had all been some bizarre outpouring of synchronicity. The man was following him, monitoring him, even taunting him.

He rose to follow.

"Hey, what's the matter?" Linda asked.

Tom sat down, feeling foolish for blocking the view for people in the row behind. The man was gone. "My foot hurt."

Several minutes later, Tom realized that he'd been neglecting the movie and Linda. They ate a light snack at a nearby restaurant, and he took her home, unexpectedly uninterested in spending the night. Linda didn't object.

"Did you have fun?" Marra asked at the next briefing.

"Oh, sure."

"You don't sound sure."

"Maybe I'm not. Do you ever want to be able to totally relax with someone?"

"Yes, I do." Marra looked away and said nothing more.

"I mean, I don't pretend with anyone that I'm going out with one person exclusively. But there's so much to remember —"

"Go on," Marra urged after he stopped.

"Nothing. I — oh, never mind." How could he tell her that he found himself thinking of her at the oddest times? She was always so easy to talk to. Why was it difficult now?

Too soon, it was time to leave again.

Back in his apartment, Tom stretched out in his hammock and flipped through the book, trying to avoid thinking about Marra or the man.

Ah ha. Teresa Chavez, San Francisco, 2003, age 32, redhead, disconaut, statuesque, intelligent, sultry, sinsational, divorced. Perfect. For variety, when he met Teresa he had retrieved her purse from a street thief who happened to be himself, disguised.

The only drawback was that Tom wasn't too fond of 2003, a year with the dubious honor of having seen the invention of a windshield wiper that swept in time with the car-radio beat.

That evening, after dancing several dances from the long list he'd had to learn, Tom relaxed with

Teresa in a bar. The wall screens were set for the Arctic. Blizzard conditions obscured the view in three directions. Part of the fourth wall sporadically displayed a view of an iceberg several hundred meters away. He was feeling at ease until he noticed a man at a table by himself.

The man's back was to Tom. There was no way to tell who he was, so Tom tried to stop wondering. He must be going crazy to be ignoring Teresa.

Teresa was usually carefree — her normal idea of a big decision was to flip a *large* coin — but tonight she was talking animatedly about shutting down fission reactors as more fusion units came on line.

The conversation didn't last much longer. Tom's end of the dialogue fell apart as the dark-haired man left his table and passed theirs as he left. The lighting was poor, but light from an opened swinging door revealed the somber face of the same man from 1978.

Who was he and why was he there? He could represent only the authorities. Who else would trace him through time? But if Tom's tampering had been discovered, why wasn't he under confinement or stranded here?

"Back in minutes," Tom said to Teresa, rising to follow the man. Tom trailed not far behind as the man neared the men's bathroom. Before the door swung completely shut, Tom reached it, but inside the bathroom there was only a heavyset man combing his hair.

Back at the table, Tom said, "Teresa, let's get out. Your place, OK?"

"Just can't wait, can you? Isn't some wet-T-shirt dream. Patience, patience." But she grabbed her coat and she was grinning.

At unpredictable intervals during the night, Tom's thoughts returned to Marra, with occasional digressions to the man following him.

During the next work day, he didn't think about his assigned job for more than twenty consecutive minutes. By the end of the day, Tom was a wreck. He wanted to go home and sleep, but he knew he couldn't.

He hurried to the briefing room, but there was no sign of Marra. Agitated, he sat through the briefing. Still she didn't come. Afterward, he almost ran back to his apartment, only to pace undecidedly in front of the phone.

Several times he typed the first few letters of Marra's name, each time canceling the call. It should be so easy to call her, but it wasn't.

Finally he picked up the little black book. Maybe Linda Dorsey could take his mind off the situation. This time he would pick a private place.

A half-hour later, he was on the telephone.

"How about a barbecue?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. You picked a bad time. Betty and I were going to an Elvis Presley concert tonight. Could you try me later?"

Tom agreed and two "weeks" later he called again.

"I'm sorry. I already had something planned." Linda sounded vaguely sad. Two more "weeks" later Tom received almost the same reply.

Lillian was on her way to a speech by President Harding.

Queasy rumblings stirred his stomach as he proceeded to call Teresa in 2003, Evelyn in 1910, Tanya in 1966, and Gwen in 1993.

No luck. But then, luck wouldn't have had anything to do with it.

"Damn!" There was no point in calling anyone else. "Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn." It was 21:20 in 2225 and he couldn't get one date. Sure, maybe he could zip back to a *Mardi Gras* or *Oktoberfest*, and find another one-nighter, but Tom wanted to do that when he felt like it. Not when someone else was pulling the strings.

And why the manipulation? Was he simply being teased before the authorities clamped down?

Tom made a rapid decision. Moments later he stood on the dais, dressed for the 1970s. He set the scanner for just after his last date with Linda Dorsey and stepped it forward until the *active* light came on, not more than fifteen minutes after his own return. He set the controls for three more minutes and initiated the transfer.

When he arrived, the man from 1978 was just replacing the hotel phone in its cradle.

"Who are you?" Tom asked

"A friend."

"Some friend. I suppose you just talked to Linda Dorsey."

The man smiled. The smile seemed familiar. "Go home."

Tom was about to reply angrily that he didn't want to, but in that instant he realized going home was exactly what he did want. For all the time he had been making calls, his thoughts were actually on Marra.

"But who are you?" Tom asked.

"Does it matter? What matters is that Marra cares about you." The man touched his watch controls and he was gone.

Tom stood there silently, deciding whether to confront the man at another place in time or to do what he wanted even more to do.

Moments later, in Chicago, his fingers trembled as he typed in Marra's name, and his breath grew shorter as he listened to her phone ring. One. Two. Maybe she wasn't in. Three. Maybe she was out with someone. Four. Five. This was stupid. Why was he calling? Six. Maybe he should just hang —

"Hello. Sorry it took — oh. Hi, Tom." Marra looked better than ever in the screen.

"Hi." Suddenly aware that he was unprepared, Tom didn't know where to start. "How are you?" he asked lamely.

"All right, I guess. I just needed a break today."

"I didn't see you today. I mean — oh, I see." Tom rubbed his forehead. Conversation hadn't been this flustering in a long time. "What I'm getting at is, could we talk for a little while?"

"Go ahead. I've got something I need to tell you, too."

"Not over the phone. Could we meet? And how about somewhere unusual?" He named a time and place.

"You're sure you don't want to meet someplace more conventional?" Marra looked puzzled, but more animated.



"Just this once?"

"All right then."

Moments later, Tom stood on a dusty, dry, Colorado desert in April, 1800. A hot sun kept the chilly breeze from freezing him. To the west, low, blue mountains made the horizon buckle.

"Hello," Marra's soft voice startled him.

Tom spun to face her. Marra looked puzzled. Her expression made it suddenly hard to concentrate. Finally he said simply, "I missed you today. I've been doing a lot of thinking about you."

A quick smile curved her lips, but it faded abruptly. "Before you say anything else, I've got to tell you something. The man you've seen — the one following you. He's my brother Jannor."

"Your brother?" So that was why his smile had seemed familiar.

"He was trying to scare you off the past, so you'd focus on me. I found out this morning. About everything. About the nuisance he's been. I made him agree to stop. He had a bug in your apartment to look at your destination settings."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"He was acting the overzealous big brother. Without my knowledge. That was why I skipped today. I couldn't face you after I found out. I was going to send you a message tonight."

"I feel better," Tom said slowly, "but I still want to talk with you. I've been thinking a lot about you lately, and not because of Jannor. I want to get to know you even better."

Marra rolled her eyes. "With the kind of competition I've got?"

"You don't really have competition. My travels have been time-fillers more than anything else."

"That's easy to say. I guess you took it fairly hard with Varla, but look at you now. How many times a week do you hear, 'Not tonight, I've got a headache'? All you need to do is try a week later or see someone else. You haven't had to cope with anyone being sick, or depressed, or tired. You just retreat into fantasyland. That's competition."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it looks great. But the initial excitement wears off. You know how much trouble it is to remember everything? I mean, this isn't just worrying about accidentally calling Sally, Gertrude. All these accelerated courses on history, cultural norms, language dialects, currency, and what-all make my head hurt. I've kept track of injuries, tan, haircuts."

Tom paced in the dust. "It was fun at first, but it's wearing me down. If I had put the same energy into one longer relationship" — He rubbed the back of his neck.

"And that's not all. To be able to talk freely. Do you realize how frustrating it is to talk with someone about — about Roosevelt, when you're aware of Kennedy's assassination? I have a devil of a time remembering what I should and shouldn't know when I'm talking. And what if one of those women tries to find me?"

"You've been talking a lot about the negatives."

Marra said quietly.

Tom hesitated. "The positives are harder to talk



about. For a while, when the positives occurred to me, I thought about Varla. So I stopped thinking about them. Until recently. Until I started thinking more and more about you. I don't have to play games with you. I can say exactly what I mean. And the peaks and valleys are a lot more fun."

"Say that another way?"

"Maybe I would have to deal with someone else's bad moods. But it works both ways. The valleys don't get so deep when there's someone to help bear the hurt. And the peaks are twice as good because you can share them with someone else. I guess I'm just not suited to static relationships. They either die away or try to grow out of hand. I'm tired of having to maintain just the right amount of detachment. I guess this has all crept up on me. When I didn't see you last night or this afternoon — I —"

"I'm not making this any easier, am I?" Marra said at last. "I want to see more of you, too. But how brave are you, Tom? How afraid are you of the possibility of being turned down? Do you want to try again with someone who could get close enough to hurt you? It might be different." Marra grew quiet, but Tom could still clearly see the excitement in her eyes, the energy she radiated.

"I'll take that chance," he said calmly. "What about you?"

Marra bit her lower lip and beamed. "Yes."

The constriction in Tom's chest dissipated. "I'd like to have a long talk. What about the restaurant on the Pinnacle, at 19:00, real-time tomorrow?"

"That sounds great." Marra reached for her watch.

"Wait! Before you go — satisfy my curiosity. How did Jannor squelch my dates?"

Marra grinned ruefully. "He said he was your brother and you'd been released from a mental institution. Something about ax-murdering five women. He suggested a current-events test. If you were out of touch with the present, they might believe him on the phone. He mentioned a Linda Dorsey? She was going to a concert given by an Elvis Presley in 1978." A gust of wind blew long strands of Marra's hair across her face. "He died in 1977."

Marra's parting smile doubled his pulse rate. She blew him a kiss as she vanished.

Tom stood grinning for a long moment, watching dust swept along by the wind, before he touched his watch controls. He had a date in a few centuries and he didn't want to be late.

— ABO —

# Muttmind

By Ann K. Schwader

Art by David R. Deitrick

Swift and silent on four strong legs, she trotted beside her partner and let the night breeze carry the city's life to her nose. If there was trouble in the air as well, she did not fear it. Her body was sprung-steel young, her teeth clean and sharp and sound. A shadow among shadows, she waited for the next command to action ...

Cold wetness woke her. Wiping sleepgrit from her eyes, Martha Rutger blearily tried to focus. Her own face looked back at her, dark-furred and slender-muzzled.

No.

Shutting her eyes again, Martha forced herself back to identity. Second episode this month. She'd have to report it this time; no room in the program for officers who didn't monitor themselves.

Artemis whined softly, and Martha reopened her eyes. The two-year-old black shepherd nuzzled her. Scratching her fingers through the thick fur, Martha carefully avoided the sensitive patternplug set at the base of the bitch's skull. Did it ever hurt her, as her own did lately on cold nights?

Gently pushing Arte's nose away, Martha swung both legs over the side of the bed and winced. Touch of arthritis. Running a hand through her short iron-gray hair, she watched enviously as her partner trotted around the cubicle's living/sleeping partition and out of sight. Hell for a K9L handler to get old. Youth was always being thrown in your face: no canine recruit served past its tenth birthday.

Thinking about birthdays depressed her. Shrugging into her robe, Martha moved to the streaked window and touched one square transparent. Outside, the city burned in pollution-enhanced sunset. In less than two hours, she and Arte'd be patrolling the ashes, moving together through a darkness she'd come to welcome.

Somewhere along the fringes of her mind, she still felt the shepherd's presence. Not a good sign. Martha ignored it; she'd had symptoms with her last two partners, and still qualified for a third. No matter what the force's psych boys said, there was no avoiding some personality leak. Most K9Ls didn't care, finding the close link with another creature — even nonhuman — preferable to loneliness.

Loneliness was probably the program's best recruiting angle. To never be alone again ...

By the time she'd gotten into uniform and fed Arte, Martha was feeling better. Even her bitter mugful of cheap "coffee" only put a welcome edge on

her nerves. Scraping up the last of her powdered eggs, she dropped her dishes in the tiny corner sink and took down Arte's leash. Though her housing complex was a good one as they went, she'd never enjoyed the noise and sterility of high-density life. She and her partner'd be at the station early again tonight — as usual.

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"I give up," said the rookie. "Why *did* the city tear out all the hydrants in '25?"

"To keep the muttminds from soaking their uniforms!"

It was an old joke, and not a particularly good one. Martha was glad to see the rookie flinch a little at the sound of Arte's nails in the corridor behind him. The sergeant who'd told the joke stood his ground, though.

"Muttminds," he repeated, just loud enough for Martha to hear. "An' that one's a real bitch ..."

The remark's viciousness made her wonder if she'd really been intended to overhear, after all. Like many handlers, she'd probably had sensory bleed-through to her partner's keener ears.

"Don't mind it, girl," she muttered, more to herself than Arte. "Solos never understand."

Though they made it to the station's K9L wing without further incident, Martha was still relieved to hear the wing's door whisper shut behind them. Two other officers and their partners were already in the spacious main assembly room. Like herself, she guessed, they preferred each other's company to the squadroom's coffee crowd.

"Hey, Browning, what's with Panzer?"

The young officer looked up at her from spray bandaging his Doberman's forehead. "Damn bladebreak on last night's patrol. Carryin' about six right there in the open. Tried to make the arrest quiet, but he tried pitchin' one into Panz ..."

He rubbed his own forearm in sympathetic pain. "We dropped him anyhow, but it wasn't clean."

Martha frowned. Since the Unreasonable Force Act of '32, weapons arrests were tough. Some gangs wore guns or knives openly for status, daring stunner-armed police to relieve them of their property. Police died. Criminals didn't.

K9Ls at least had a chance.

Settling herself on a bench to wait, Martha wondered why the force didn't recruit more teams than it did. Too controversial, probably. Pattern linking had been safe for almost twenty years, but most civilians still didn't like the idea of human and canine brain patterns being synchronized. People on the street tended to give linked teams a wide berth —



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great crowd control, but hell on PR.

Seven more teams came in while Martha waited, the last evening's contingent. Soon after the last K9L partner'd sniffed greetings with the others, their linkman showed up.

"Ladies and gentlemen, under the provision of Departmental Code 5062, it is my duty to remind you ..."

Same song every night. Martha listened with half an ear as the electropsych tech outlined possible risks of entering into and maintaining a link. Officially, any handler could cite "5062 grounds" and be reassigned at any time.

In practice, it never happened.

The minute the tech's spiel finished, the first team was waiting for linkup. Martha and Arte were second. Watching through the link booth's reinforced glass, Martha felt a familiar excitement as their senior K9L connected his patch cord. While the linkman's instruments monitored, man and shepherd synchronized mental patterns, entering into a closer bond than any possible through conventional training.

Once it had scared her. She remembered the shock of her own first link, how she'd nearly panicked when her lips drew back from her teeth and a growl she'd never expected emerged from her throat. Now the same growl came from the senior K9L, and she felt nothing but relief. His link had taken.

When hers and Arte's turn came, Martha fell into

linkup like a smooth dive into deep water. The linkman frowned.

"Rutger, that's the fastest synch I've seen in weeks. You haven't been having episodes, have you?"

With Arte's comforting presence warm in her mind, Martha shook her head.

Slowing her patch cord carefully in its inner belt pouch, she left the booth feeling twenty years younger. The youth, she knew, was in Arte's limbs and not hers — but it was hers to share for the next eight-hour patrol. Even tonight's bad-news assignment couldn't change that.

\*\*\*\*\*

G. Ford Memorial was quieter than she'd expected. The sprawling fed-housing block slumbered, overhangs and blind alleys deserted in the scrutiny of her faceshield's enhanced vision. Arte trotted beside her, nose forever investigating what lay ahead. Garbage, mostly. If K9L's blessing was enhanced hearing, its curse was a too-keen sense of smell.

They'd been on patrol almost five hours when the first emergency call of the night cracked through her earphones.

"Kamikaze drop ... eyewitness-confirmed. Repeat, Kamikaze drop in progress. Coordinates follow ..."

Shit.

Martha triggered her helmet's backup beacon before responding. Kamikaze was the latest battle drug,

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# ABO



a gang luxury prized for what it did to a fighter's head. Nobody on the force knew where it came from — or its exact chemical make-up. The damn stuff hit the nasal lining headed straight for the brain, and it was too new for anyone to have confiscated a sample.

The drop was only two blocks away. Martha moved silently in her softsoled boots, Arte close beside her. From time to time, the shepherd's nose brought her the stink of nervous humanity. Probably customers. When they were almost on top of the coordinates, she thought her partner ahead, trusting the bitch's black coat to blend in shadows better than her own subdued uniform.

They'd gotten there late. Arte's eyes sent back the image of one suspect only, adolescent male. Huddled in a corner of the alley, he clutched what her partner's nose told her was Kamikaze — several tubes. A dealer. Martha edged along the wall to join her partner, one hand already at her holster. After tonight, the force's labs would have all the samples they needed.

"Hands up!" The helmet's microphone reverberated her voice through Ford Memorial. "Put down the stuff and step away. This is an arrest..."

Before her trigger reflex could react, the young dealer snorted an entire tube. Pupils dilated with overdose, he easily dodged the slow two-pronged dart her weapon fired and sprinted down a side alley Arte's unenhanced vision hadn't picked up. Martha sent her partner after him, hoping the little bastard wasn't armed. Kamikaze hit the nerves like an electric jolt, inducing paranoid rage along with hyperfast reflexes.

"Kamikaze O.D.," she spat into her helmet mike. "A definite. Suspected dealer, am following..."

In the rat maze of Ford Memorial's alleys, Martha moved as quickly as she dared, relying on Arte's mental feedback to track her suspect. Once on the scent, few stimuli could distract the shepherd from assigned actions.

Rounding a corner after her partner, Martha's link-enhanced hearing registered a faint click behind a nearby trash compressor. Long habit froze her in her tracks. I.D. the sound first, then move...

Searing pain ripped through her light-duty armor. Gut shot. Fighting for consciousness, Martha sent two stun darts toward the compressor before her knees gave. It was all she could do to crawl behind a pile of discarded packing molds, where she lay watching her life leak out between gloved fingers.

Damn the Unreasonable Force Act.

Whoever'd wanted her dead in the first place hadn't hung around to finish the job. Typical Kamikaze freak. Stupid of her to run into an ambush; high-caliber weapons were teething rings in zoos like Ford. No way anybody'd find her in time, either.

Artemis' warm breath brought her back to agonized awareness. "Don't bother, girl," Martha gasped, wasting breath without knowing it. Her mental commands were gone anyway, along with the rest of her memories and thoughts and fears drifting farther into darkness...

No. Fumbling at her belt, she almost screamed as one finger prodded the wound. Though a haze of pain, she worked the patch cord free of its pouch and lay exhausted for a moment. *Just one more step.* Arte

stopped whining and licked her face, as though sensing what they had to do.

Her own patternplug was the hardest. Sweat ran in hot streams down her face as she worked the patch cord in, made sure the interfaces connected. *Down here, Arte.* Her nerves shrieked as she struggled to fit the second end of the cord into its socket. The shepherd never flinched, even when her hand shook and gouged a prong into sensitive flesh around the plug itself.

Black dizziness told her there wasn't much time left. Holding Arte against her with one arm, Martha shut her eyes and tried to recall everything the linkman'd told them not to do. Once a link took, he'd said, it was good for the whole shift. Under no circumstances should you attempt to relink in the field ...

As she had in the link booth, she felt Arte's consciousness blend with her own. *Rutger, that's the fastest synch I've seen in weeks.* Deeper still. There was no alley now, no pain. Like a swimmer forcing herself toward an infinitely distant bottom, she took one last breath and felt darkness close over her.

\*\*\* \*\*

"Jesus, Artemis!"

Browning turned away from Rutger's black shepherd, unwilling to look beyond her blood-matted coat to what slumped against a wall in a trash-filled back alley. This report he'd have to doctor. Even with a Kamikaze tube still clutched in the suspect's hand, there was no question what had killed him.

Panzer whined accusingly. His partner forced himself to look again, sickened not by the violence but by how it had happened. *Extreme K9L reaction, provoked,* he'd call it, thought that didn't half cover what the shepherd had done. Looked like she'd defended against a swung length of scrap metal...

Except she'd skipped the armhold and taken his throat.

Rutger hadn't looked a hell of a lot better when they'd found her. Some K-freak with an old .44 Mag, he guessed. Sicker than most. He'd even plugged her own patch cord into her skull...

"Muttmind," he said quietly to himself. Somehow, it didn't sound much like an insult. Martha Rutger had lived and died one, and her last partner'd avenged her with near-human dedication. On a cold scent, Artemis had managed to run down the dealer responsible for most of Ford Memorial's Kamikaze, kill him, and show a backup team exactly where the rest of his stock was on his body.

Not bad for a two-year-old shepherd.

"You're quite a lady," he said, scratching Artemis behind one bloody ear. "Hope your next partner deserves you. Rutger was a real bitch sometimes, but there wasn't a K9L who did the job better."

Wagging her tail in agreement, the woman who had been Martha Rutger trotted beside Panzer and Browning as they returned to their patrol flier. No arthritic twinges, no bone-deep exhaustion after the longest patrol of her life. Only the instant responsiveness of muscles that hadn't had time to get old.

For the next eight years at least, she was going to enjoy being a bitch.



W. J. 87

# Boneflower

(Continued from page 2)

tervied. He waited until she fell into a sort of watchful trance, then he shut off the screens.

He rubbed at his weary eyes. He lay back on the con couch, and slipped into dreamless sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

He woke with a sense of wrongness. It took him a moment to see it, but then he sat up, hands going to the dark surface of the main touchboard, where a thousand telltales should have burned.

The ship was dead. What had she done?

What was she doing now?

He leaped to the bulkhead, slapped his hand against the lockplate.

Nothing happened. He beat against the monomol until his hands bled.

Finally he noticed the glimmer of a message marker and activated it.

"Jolo," Sinda spoke from the screen. "You were stupid. Did you think this moron of a ship could keep me locked up, when it couldn't even keep Talm from the synthesizer?" Her face twisted. "It was easy, Jolo, easy to fool it into letting me go, easy to make it lock you up, and easiest of all to make it kill itself." She was spitting the words.

"But you can fix it, when I come back and let you out. So you see, everything will still be fine."

She drew a deep breath, then seemed to get control of herself. "I left the life support systems up; you won't starve or thirst."

"I'll see you soon." Her image shattered into random specks of color.

\*\*\*\*\*

Her sabotage had blinded the exterior cams, so he couldn't see what was happening outside.

He remembered the matrix he'd taken from the robocam. He found it in his pocket, a thin white flake of memory.

He slowed the scan when the robocam swiveled to catch a shot of the crawler thumping over the lip of the cirque. Sinda drove to the foot of the ascensor, crunching through the powdery bones of the oxen. She went directly to the pool.

The pool accepted her as readily as before.

Barram watched her spinning in glory, then her slow painful emergence at the far end. Her face had aged, for all its tranquillity, and she sat gasping in the shade of an arch.

Barram turned up the speed of cycle again. In all, he watched Sinda go to the pool three more times before the matrix saturated. Each time she was weaker. Each time she returned to the pool sooner.

\*\*\*\*\*

Days passed in silence. The crippled pool could support him for a few weeks, no more. Then the systems would fail, one by one. He sat on the con couch, his face in his hands, trying to face death calmly.

A shudder ran through the ship. Barram remembered the ship's precarious footing. Under the landing struts, the friable stone was subsiding. He strapped himself to the acceleration couch.

With an ominous grinding rattle the ship lurched, then stabilized for a moment. But then it went over in a rush, tumbling faster and faster, down the slope.

Until it smashed into the shrine, and split open.

\*\*\*\*\*

Daylight shone on his face. His mouth tasted bloody, and he hung upside down from the harness.

A long time later, he crawled from the shattered hull, bruised and scraped, but with, it seemed, no broken bones or serious internal injuries. When he had gathered his strength, he went to the pool.

Her body formed the newest petal in the flower, lying at a slight angle to the wall, as if she'd dived close to it at the final moment, seeking escape or comfort.

She wasn't decomposing, in the usual sense. Her body was simply dissolving into transparency, the bones beginning to show through. Her hair was a white cloud in the motionless depths. He was grateful that she lay face down. He reached out his hand to touch the surface of the pool, and felt a cool dry resilience.

When the sun had dropped close to the hills, he rose painfully and went to the place where Sinda had first fallen in. He approached gingerly, stretching out to test each step. When he touched the sensitive area of the coping, it started to tilt, and he jerked his foot away. The coping settled back, almost reluctantly. He cackled.

"Not yet, not yet," he whispered.

As the sun fell behind the edge of the world, Barram considered his options.

He was old. And tired. Trapped on this empty world, without even the minimal rejuve tech aboard the ship, he had only a few years left, five, maybe less. He would die alone, unless he reactivated the seed-ship's wombs. There were plenty of viable human embryos, but that was an ugly choice, too. He would be dead long before the children were old enough to learn to fear the pool.

Barram almost took the one step forward.

"No," he said, old body trembling. "No, I won't." He moved back.

He wasn't Sinda, young and soft, consumed by grief, vulnerable to the pool's terminal mercy. No, he was old and hard, and the long years had burned away some of his capacity for sorrow.

Barram shook his fist at the pool, tears of anger streaming down his lined cheeks. But then a wild notion came stealing into his mind. He smiled. *If the pool took away pain and gave years, when swum from this end, then perhaps...*

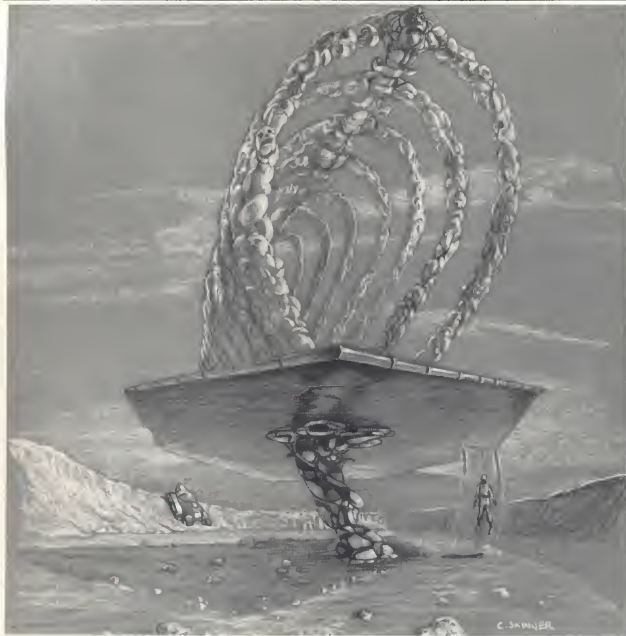
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He circled the pool, looked down at her one last time, then he sprang from the coping in a clean, shallow dive.

His momentum carried him skipping along the surface, bouncing on an impossibly tight, impossibly slippery membrane. A crimson light flared across the pool, and the sorrows rose up, tearing at him.

If all the griefs had taken firm hold of him, he would certainly have been pulled to the bottom. But so much pain ... the sorrowing dead jostled each other, fighting to enter him, so that only a few succeeded.

He flailed his arms wildly, kicked his legs, and



moved a few inches. The pain that entered him pulled him deeper into the membrane, so that his traction increased. And as he progressed, his strength increased, his heart grew younger, his muscles more supple.

He moved faster and faster, his tears leaving a trail of darkness on the glowing surface of the pool.

Such sadness, such hideous sadness.

He had a terrible vision of Sinda rising toward him, her hair streaming, crone's face distorted in a scream of grief, claws reaching. He would not look down.

At the far end, he pulled himself from the pool, quick as a seal, and as the coping began rising to dump him back in, he grasped the lifting edge and flipped nimbly onto safe ground.

His body shook with the griefs of the colonists. Hard work, the strange sicknesses, the rootless sadness felt by men and women raised by mother-droids, a thousand other hurts. He told himself, over

and over, *it won't last, it won't last.*

A dozen times during the night he made up his mind to roll back into the pool, but the dawn finally came, and with it a trickle of joy, that he had survived.

Barram got to his feet. He looked at his hands, corded with new muscle. He felt the strong blood pumping, vigorous life filling the arch of his chest. He was young again.

\*\*\* \* \* \* \*

The crawler carried him back to the village.

Barram went up to the seedship and decanted the first embryo. Spinning the womb's lockwheel down, he said, "Hurry, now," as if the embryo could hear him. He smiled, thinking of the terrible stories he would imagine for the children, to frighten them away from the badlands. Someday, when their sorrows were smaller and Barram was old again, he would tell them about the pool. By then they would be wise enough to be frightened by the truth.

He set about filling the rest of the wombs.

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